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PETER WARING

By

FORREST REID

Now it is the time of night
That the graves, all gaping wide,
Every one lets forth his sprite,
In the church-way paths to glide :
And we the fairies, that do run
By the three Hecates team,
From the presence of the sun,
Following darkness like a dream,
Now are frolic ; not a mouse
Shall disturb this hallow'd house.'

A Midsummer-Night's Dream



PENGUIN BOOKS

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To
E. M. FORSTER
now as then

THE first version of this novel was published in 1912 under the title of *Following Darkness*. Not satisfied with that version, I have rewritten it from beginning to end. Much that was there is gone, and much that is there now was not there before. In fact I should like the whole to be regarded as a new book, for it really is that. I have even ventured to change the title, the old title usually having been misinterpreted. It was not recognized that it came from Puck's song, and that the completed line is "Following darkness like a dream." On the contrary, it was associated with the Bible, thus acquiring a moral significance quite alien to the mere imaginative suggestion I had in mind.

F.R.

February, 1937.

PETER WARING

Chapter I

To return after an absence of nearly twenty years to a place beloved in childhood and boyhood is apt, I'm afraid, to prove a disillusioning experience. Instead of joyful recognition there is a feeling that something has gone wrong. We remember this, we remember that—but with a difference. And then suddenly we realize what the difference is ; it is simply that the scale is altered. Walls are not quite so high, lawns quite so spacious, streams quite so broad or so deep as they once were. At least, that was my impression yesterday.

To-day I am less certain. It seems to be a matter of relation, and I think I must have begun to slip back a little. Moreover, I can guess very nearly the exact moment when this mysterious retrogression began. It was last night, just after midnight, for it was the clock striking twelve that awakened me out of a doze. I picked up my book, which had fallen to the floor, yawned once or twice, and decided to go to bed.

The night was warm and all the windows were wide open, though the curtains had been drawn. These windows I now proceeded to close and to fasten, but when I reached the last I stood for a few minutes looking out into the moonlit garden and listening to the sound of waves breaking on the shore. That was the beginning of it. How often, long ago, had I listened to that remote, timeless sound ! As for the house—it had always been haunted, always alive, and always it had possessed a strange power to evoke the past. One more ghost had glided into its keeping ; and it was the ghost of a boy—the boy whose second home this had been—that was now plucking me by the hand and drawing me back—very gently, yet perceptibly and persistently.

I lit a candle and climbed the stairs to my bedroom. But on the landing at the top of the short second flight I paused to look at the so-called Velasquez—the portrait of Philip—

a copy, by Mazo, of the picture in the Louvre. I held up my candle, and its small wavering flame lent a curious air of life to the tall pale figure that had once fascinated me. Now I gazed at it more in a spirit of friendliness than anything else, and the staid sober dog, close by his master, seemed to watch me. So we remained, all three, till a sudden draught from a window left open at the end of the passage abruptly extinguished my light, leaving me with an odd impression that someone had stolen up behind me and blown it out.

These midnight fancies, combined with the hints and echoes which the hour itself had furnished, may have been responsible for the restless hours that followed. I did not lie awake; in fact I dropped asleep almost immediately: but my sleep was broken by a succession of vivid dreams, all of them harking back to the past. I had even a feeling that they were not new dreams. I mean, I had the feeling that I had dreamed them before, years ago, when as a boy I had slept in this very room. That is not likely; yet the result—I don't know why—is a strong inclination to set down simply and faithfully what that boyhood was. Looking back from a considerable distance, I can see that it formed a distinct period in my life, possessing a beginning, a middle, and an end—in other words, that there is a story in it.

Chapter 2

OF my earliest childhood I can form no consecutive picture; therefore I shall pass over it quickly. Certain incidents stand out, but the thread connecting them is wanting and it is impossible for me to be quite sure as to the order in which they occurred. Of the days before I could walk and talk I have no recollection whatever. Back further than anything else, I imagine, reach two impressions—one of being set to dance naked on a table, amid the laughter of women and the rhythmic clapping of their hands: the other, probably later in date, of what must have been a spring-cleaning, stamped on my by an inexplicable dread of those flaky collections which gather under furniture that has not been m

long time. By then I had certainly learned to talk, for those flakes of dust I called 'quacks.' I have no idea where the name came from, nor why I should have disliked 'quacks,' but they affected me with a physical disgust, and here, to my dismay, was a whole army of them. Some stupid person running after me with a broom pretended to sweep them over me, and I started bawling at the top of my voice. Then, for consolation, I was lifted up to bury my nose in a bowl of primroses and violets, and the damp cool freshness and sweetness of the flowers still remains with me as a part of the scene. That may have been before my mother had left us, when everything was gayer and brighter than it subsequently became. I am merely guessing ; I cannot be sure.

Certainly it must have been several years later and under the rule of Lizzie, that I first became aware of an odd sensibility to clothes : my actual suits of clothes, I mean ; not my undergarments. It seems strange now, but I can recall distinctly the thrill of excitement and pleasure it gave me to put on a new suit, and this peculiarity remained with me throughout my boyhood. It was quite spontaneous—a purely sensual feeling, difficult to understand, though I now realize that in some obscure way it was connected with the dawn of sex consciousness.

Another instinct which I brought with me from the unknown was an intense sympathy with animals. There was not a cat or dog or goat or donkey in the village with whom I did not strike up a friendship. I even carried this sympathy so far as to feed daily the stone lions who flanked the doorsteps at Derryaghy House. I don't suppose I ever actually believed that their morning meal of stale bread gave much pleasure to these drowsing beasts, and I had with my own eyes seen sparrows and thrushes—who very soon came to look out for me—snatch it from them before my back was turned : still, I persevered, stroking their smooth cold backs, kissing their unresponsive muzzles—just as I lavished depths of affection on a stuffed black velvet elephant, who for years was my nightly bed-fellow.

Of my mother I have no memory, though I have a vague recollection of a period when my father's influence was not yet predominant. But the period itself is like some tranquil sheet of water over which I bend in vain. No face, no picture, glimmers through it. There is really nothing—nobody prior

to Lizzie—herself a rather shadowy figure. I dare say it was she, however, who for the amusement of her friends set me to dance naked on the table. Such levity of nature would at least account for her subsequent dismissal ; but even Lizzie was gone at the time of my first pilgrimages to Derryagh House. I was accompanied on those occasions by an elderly and taciturn female named Ellen, for whom I had no affection, and whose private sorrows prevented her from being a cheerful companion. Ellen, as she often told me, had seen better days, and I could quite believe it. Certainly she derived no solace from her present occupation. She did not take to me : I had a suspicion that she faintly disliked me : and when she left—I suppose in my seventh or eighth year—I was glad that she had no successor.

What seems to me really astonishing is that I cannot remember being taught to read ; though I can remember quite well when I couldn't read ; for I have a clear recollection of lying on my stomach on the parlour floor, a book open in front of me, along whose printed and meaningless lines I drew my finger, turning page after page till the last was reached. It seems now a singularly dull pastime, but it was at least better than being read to by my father, who chose only stories with a moral in them—edifying histories of ' ministering children ' whom I loathed. The last of these sanctimonious tales I listened to was called *Cassy*. I particularly disliked *Cassy*—not because the heroine was more pious than the other small heroes and heroines I was accustomed to—but because of a scene in which she entered an empty house at night and discovered a corpse there. This gruesome adventure had an effect on my mind that for several days made me extremely reluctant to go upstairs after dark by myself. But *Jessica's First Prayer*, *Vinegar Hill*, *The Golden Ladder*, though not terrifying, were equally depressing. Every Sunday after dinner my father would take down some such volume from the shelf, open it, and put on his spectacles. Holding the book at a long distance from his eyes, he would read aloud in an unanimated voice, while I sat listening, in a mood of sullen antipathy ; for on Sundays this was my only relaxation—I was not allowed to play the most innocent game, or even go for a walk. These lachrymose stories were full of the conversations of priggish children—of harrowing scenes in gin-palaces and squalid city dens. Some of them were written

to inculcate temperance, some were written round the Ten Commandments, some to illustrate the petitions in the Lord's Prayer. They contained not the faintest glimmer of life or imagination ; from cover to cover they were ugly, dull, stupid—filled with sickness, poverty and calamity. On the afternoon when *Cassy's* successor was produced I rebelled, and in a sudden passion snatched the book out of my father's hands and flung it on the fire. I was whipped and sent to bed, but anything was better than *Vinegar Hill*, and next Sunday also I refused to listen. This time I was not beaten, only locked up in my bedroom ; and really I had triumphed, for when the fateful day came round once more the book-case was not opened, and I had never again to listen to one of those dismal stories.

Fairy stories and animal stories were what I liked best. *The Comical Doings of a Conger Eel* I read over to myself till I knew it nearly by heart, and some of the old nursery rhymes had a mysterious fascination.

*How many miles to Babylon?
Three score and ten.
Can I get there by candlelight?—
Yes, and back again.*

And I did get there. Was it something in the word 'candle-light' that evoked a definite picture of an old fantastic city of towers and turrets, lit by waving candle-flames, and with the windows all ablaze in dark, tall houses ?

Many of these rhymes had this property of picture-making :

*Hey, diddle diddle,
The cat and the fiddle,
The cow jumped over the moon;
The little dog laughed
To see such sport,
When the dish ran away with the spoon.*

Pure nonsense—yet the magic was there. Before and after the cow made her amazing leap the stuff was a mere jingle : it was the word 'moon' that brought up the picture ; and I saw the white docile beast abruptly transformed, pricked by some

sting of midsummer madness, with lowered head and long curling horns, pawing the ground restlessly, while a round glowing harvest moon hung like a Chinese lantern in the sky.

At this time I had only two or three books I cared for, but as I grew older I found more. Up at Derryaghy House was a whole library where I might rummage without any other interference than that which my father could exercise from a distance, and naturally this was slight. Sometimes when I brought home a book he did not approve of, he would send me back with it ; but if I had begun it I always finished it. I made this a rule ; though if I had not begun it I let my father have his way.

Everything connected with the East had deep attraction for me—or, shall I say, with what I imagined to be the East—a country of magicians and mysterious talismans, of crouching Sphinxes and enchanted gardens. I delighted in the more marvellous stories in *The Arabian Nights*, and I regretted infinitely that life was not really like this. To go for a walk and fall straightway on some wonderful adventure—that was what I wished would happen. I remember, too, poring over a big folio of Eastern monuments. Those mystical winged beasts with human heads, in their attitude of eternal waiting and listening touched some secret chord in my imagination—their strangeness seemed oddly and inexplicably familiar. I appeared to remember—but ever so dimly—having seen them before. Not in pictures, but under a hot, heavy, languid sun—long, long ago. The sensuousness and indolence of the Asiatic temper pleased me. The melodious sound of a voice singing through the cool twilight ; the notes of a lute dying slowly into silence ; another voice, low and clear, reading from the Koran—where had I heard all that ? I saw great coloured bazaars, where grave merchants with long beards sat cross-legged and silent ; where beautiful, naked, golden-haired slaves stood waiting for a purchaser ; where you might buy silken flying carpets that would carry you over the whole world, or black ebony horses swifter than light.

Mrs. Carroll had given me one of the upstairs rooms at Derryaghy to be my own. I had a bedroom, too, but this playroom I was allowed to furnish myself from a store of ancient furniture, which, for I don't know how long, had been gathering dust and cobwebs in an immense attic. Everything was more

or less threadbare, faded, and worn, but I had plenty to choose from, and the actual rummaging was exciting. I found a quaint little piano, with only two or three octaves of notes, and most of those dumb except for a twangling of hidden wires. This I thought must have been Prudence Carroll's spinet, because it looked exactly like the one beside which she was standing in her portrait : indeed, that was my chief reason for bringing it downstairs. For I liked Prudence Carroll ; I liked her picture ; and sometimes, at dusk, when I struck softly one of the cracked treble notes of the spinet, I would imagine her spirit stealing up on tip-toe behind me to listen.

There was a cushioned window-seat in this room, low and deep, and from it I could look out over the sea. In summer, with the window wide open, I could listen to it also. From the sea came, I think, an undercurrent of dreaming that ran through all the early part of my life. Though I played cricket and football and bathed with the other village boys, I had not really much in common with them. I liked them well enough, but when they were not there they disappeared completely from my thoughts. I joined in their games, but I had private amusements which they did not share, and about which I said nothing.

Unfortunately, there were night dreams as well as day dreams. The former, moreover, were anything but pleasant, having a monotonous similarity—a cat and mouse element—which nothing in my waking life seemed to account for. Nearly always they were dreams of escape—or rather of trying to escape, for I rarely, if ever, succeeded—dreams commencing in curiosity and ending in terror. And the worst of it was that sometimes I cried out and disturbed my father, who slept in the next room. Then I would feel very much ashamed, and even more resentful, because, though he never actually said so, I could see he held the view that uneasy slumbers implied an uneasy conscience.

My father—David Waring—was the village schoolmaster at Newcastle, County Down ; and our house was next door to the school. My bedroom window looked out over the sea, about a hundred yards away ; and behind the house, though at some distance, were the Mourne Mountains and the Derryaghy estate, which latter took in the lower slopes of Slieve Donard.

Our house, when the Virginia creeper that covered it was red, looked pretty enough from the road, but its charm ended there. Within doors, the most that could be said for it was that it was clean and tidy—the few attempts at decoration being crude in the extreme. My father had a strong liking for illuminated texts, and specimens of these were hung up in every room, not excepting the w.c. They were his only extravagance, what furniture there was being cheap and gimcrack, while it was characteristic of him that he had never even bought himself a comfortable chair.

He was a tall man, thin and grizzled, of pale complexion and dressed always in a black coat and waistcoat, with striped grey trousers. He wore a beard and moustache, both somewhat ragged, and his brown eyes were intensely melancholy. His hands and feet were coarse and large, his movements clumsy. There was power in his face, I think, but it was not intellectual power, and in his speech and manner was a depressing lack of anything approaching geniality. I know I am not giving a sympathetic portrait; I know now that he may have been different before the tragic failure of his marriage had disillusioned and embittered him. I suspect that he had passionately loved my mother; but I suspect, too, that it was with a gloomy and jealous love, for he had a gloomy and jealous nature. He gave me the impression that he did everything from a sense of duty, and nothing because he took a pleasure in it. He cannot have been well-off, since he had no private means. Nevertheless, we lived in a way that seemed unnecessarily comfortless. And while he was not ungenerous if it were some cases of distress that had come to his knowledge, in ordinary life he was near. Also he was suspicious—and particularly, I thought, of me. We had nothing in common—not a single taste, inclination, or idea. I knew he was unhappy, and I hated unhappiness—at least, of that never-ending variety. When I was with him I rarely felt at ease, and this made me sulky and perpetually on my guard. I was not more with him than I could help, and as we lived by ourselves, with only an old woman who came in every day to look after the house and do the cooking, it must have been easy for him to see that I avoided his society. I was perfectly conscious that I had no affection for him. We were father and son, but we weren't friends, we never could have

been friends. For that matter he had no friends, no visitors, and I don't think wanted any.

One night, when I was about fourteen, I woke up in the dark with the feeling that it was very late and that I was not alone in my room. Next moment I knew that my father was there, kneeling beside my bed. I lay absolutely quiet : I knew that he was praying, and praying for me. It was distressing, and in a sense rather awful, but I only wished that he would go away. Presently I heard him sigh, and then rise to his feet, but still I gave no sign. I heard him moving on tip-toe to the door ; I heard the door being softly opened and closed—the faint click of the latch as it slipped back into its place. I lay on, staring into the darkness, wondering why he had come in. I didn't like it. It made me feel uncomfortable. I supposed that it was because he cared for me—very much—but somehow this did not help matters. It was not the sort of love that begets love in return. It was all wrong—morbid, oppressive. Though he loved me, I knew he had very little confidence in me, and believed I had an infinite capacity for yielding to temptations. What temptations ? By this time I knew that when my mother had left us she had gone to somebody else. I guessed at any rate that she was living now with somebody else, for she had sent a sum of money for my education, which my father had returned, though some scruple of conscience had made him think it right to tell me he had done so. But he had explained nothing, and I had asked no questions. As I lay awake that night I thought of it all, and I felt pretty sure that there was something of which he was afraid. It had to do with me, but it could hardly be that he was afraid that I might leave him and go to my mother. That would mean leaving Mrs. Carroll—the one person whom I loved.

Naturally I never alluded to my father's midnight visit, and of course neither did he. We went on as before, but now more than ever I felt uneasy when we were alone together. I had known for a long while that his chief aim was to make me religious, and I could have told him that it was impossible. It was not so much that I disbelieved what I was taught of religion, as that these instructions aroused in me an implacable antagonism. I did not like the idea of an all-seeing God, for instance, who figured in several of the texts. Imperfectly

grasped, this conception represented to my mind a kind of tyranny, a kind of espionage, which I strongly resented. Moreover, I detested Sundays, and everything connected with them. I went to church against my will, and when there, in revenge, with an incredible obstinacy I would shut my ears to all that went on—prayers, hymns, and sermons. This became my habitual attitude; and only once was I scared out of it, and then not for long. It was when I was about thirteen, and my father had insisted on taking me to hear some evangelist who was conducting a revival mission in connection with our church. During the first part of the service all went as usual : I was merely bored, and when the sermon was about to begin prepared myself to think of other things. But somehow the text, or texts, delivered in a cold impressive voice, arrested my attention :

‘For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom : and great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines and pestilences ; and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven . . . Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams : and I will show wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath ; blood and fire, and vapour of smoke : the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood . . . And then shall they see the Son of Man coming in a cloud, with power and great glory.’

In spite of myself, the vivid menacing suggestiveness of the words alarmed me, and I listened intently to what followed. It seemed clear that the end of the world was at hand. The signs were taken up one by one, and with growing dismay I learned that each had been fulfilled, that nothing remained now but the blowing of the last trumpet, which, according to the preacher—he seemed even to regard it as highly probable—might take place that night. I thought so too ; for by the time he had reached this point my discomfiture had become abject fear, and I joined fervently in the concluding prayer. But why had I not been told before of this imminent danger ? How could I reform my whole life and get into a state of grace all in a moment ! Yet to do so was essential. When we got back from church, it was a very subdued boy who sat by his father’s side, a Bible open on the table in front of him. I read with a feverish eagerness, partly to prove my change of heart, and partly

to defer as long as possible the hour of bed-time. There was a horrible plausibility about what I had heard. The concluding words kept on ringing in my ears : “ I see no reason why it should not be this very night ! ’

And wasn't it, indeed, just the kind of thing that would happen at night ? I thought so, and was tormented by a dread of the hideous trumpet blast ; by a bloody moon, and by the apparition of dead and shrouded bodies, rising out of the churchyard with glaring eyeballs and tied-up jaws—dreadful galvanized corpses hurrying to meet their Lord in the air. At length I could put off my bed-time no longer. My father had already reminded me of it twice. I could see that he was not convinced by the open Bible, and had become suspicious as to what passages I was so interested in. Well—I knew myself there were passages of that sort in the Bible—having, as a matter of fact, searched for them on more than one occasion in the past—but I wasn't doing so now. Ten minutes later, on my knees in the small candle-lit bedroom, I was lying to my God of a tremendous love I had begun to feel for him ; yet in spite of this I passed a wretched night. Next morning I continued my miserable hypocrisy, grovelling before this frightful Deity for whom I had developed so sudden and demonstrative an affection, while at the same time I innocently begged him not to come. Gradually, but not for several days, these terrors faded, receiving their death-blow when my father told me that all Jews must return to Jerusalem before the last day. Now there was a Jewish family living at Castlewellan that I thought I could keep my eye on ; and as I had heard nothing of a projected removal I felt fairly safe.

One result was that I began to think things out for myself, and a few months later I felt nothing but contempt for that brief conversation. My father read aloud to me a crude anecdote, taken I think, from Mark Pattison's *Memoirs*. A man in a public-house in Leicestershire had used the oath : ‘ God strike me blind ! ’ and instantly he had been stricken blind by a flash of lightning. On becoming converted he had recovered his sight while taking the Sacrament. The truth of this edifying tale was, I believe, vouched for by a friend and disciple of Cardinal Newman, but to me it seemed both stupid and revolting. My father accepted it of course, but I didn't,

and that very afternoon, standing by the window in my own room, I said aloud and deliberately : ' God strike me blind ! ' I waited with a mingled trepidation and incredulity, as if I had thrown a bomb into the unknown. Would it explode ? A sea-gull flew past the window, white against the dark autumn sky : the leaves of the Virginia creeper trembled and grew still. I said again, and in a louder, more defiant voice : ' God strike me blind ! ' But no flash of lightning followed. Down below, on the brown beach, the waves curled over with a slow musical splash. I looked into the sky, but it was calm and untroubled, and so, very soon, was my own mind. I decided that the story was a lie.

Most of my difficulties, however, were metaphysical rather than religious. The conception of eternity baffled me. I could in a vague way think of myself as living on for ever, but I could not with the same facility move my mind backward. It seemed possible, in fact, certain, that there could be no end, but I could not imagine that there had been no beginning. Quite unaware of it, I was grappling with Herbert Spencer's ' unknowables. ' ' If there had been no beginning, how could we have got as far as this ? ' I asked myself. ' Where I am now—this particular moment in time—must be at a certain distance from all other moments, or it cannot be anywhere. If there was no beginning, then to-day cannot be any further on than yesterday. Either there was a beginning, or else time itself does not exist. ' My brain grew dizzy with vain efforts to grasp what was ungraspable. I would break a stick and say : ' God can make it that I haven't broken it . . . But can he ? If I shut my eyes, and when I open them the stick is unbroken, that will only show he has mended it. Nothing can undo the past : there can be no omnipotent God. ' And so on, and so on. These insoluble problems were, nevertheless, just what fascinated me. The practical ethics of religion—that I should be good and encourage in myself a variety of Christian virtues—that kind of thing did not interest me at all. I possessed some of those virtues, I suppose, but I made no attempt to acquire any that were not mine by nature. I hated any kind of meanness or cruelty ; I was straightforward, trusting, and in certain directions extremely affectionate ; but I was selfish, egotistical, proud, sensual, impatient—flying into violent passions for very little—and above all, I had a stubbornness nothing could move.

Chapter 3

IT is difficult, as I have said, on looking back over those days, to see things in any strictly chronological order. It is as if one's memories floated in a kind of haze, appearing and disappearing, melting into one another. But there is a definite point from which my story becomes consecutive, and I can carry it back as far as that cold clear January morning, the morning of Mr. Carroll's funeral, when I stood beside my father, at some distance from the grave, among a group of people, most of whom I did not know and was never to see again. I examined them all with a mild and impartial curiosity and was struck by the fact that none of them showed the slightest emotion, though all alike wore a grave and decorous air. For that matter I did not feel sad myself—merely grave and decorous, and conscious that I was wearing a new black suit. Mr. Carroll had always been perfectly amiable to me, but I had seen little of him, and when we had met he had looked at me vaguely and without interest. I had only known him as an invalid, occasionally hobbling about with the aid of two black, silver-mounted sticks, but for the most part keeping pretty closely to his own rooms. He had seemed to me to be very old, yet at his death I learned that actually he was younger than my father, his appearance of decrepitude being simply the result of a disorderly life combined with a naturally wretched constitution. I learned, at the same time, the history of Mrs. Carroll's marriage : how before the first year was well out, she had ceased to see much of her husband, and a little later had ceased to see him at all. It was fifteen years afterwards, when he had become the futile worn-out creature I knew, that he had returned to her. As the coffin, bared of its covering of pale, sickly-smelling flowers, was lowered into the dark, gaping grave, and the damp earth rattled heavily on the lid with a hollow brutal sound, I recalled the strange white face, the watery blue eyes, the fixed smile, the soft polite manner ; but I was not in the least grieved to know that I should never see Mr. Carroll again. And when, a week or so later, I was once more in and out of the house just as of old, I had

practically ceased to think of him. Once or twice, passing the closed door of his room at dusk, the thought of meeting his ghost, of hearing the tap, tap of his stick coming towards me down the long passage, gave me a momentary thrill ; but even these poor tributes to his memory faded swiftly, and soon passed into oblivion.

Chapter 4

SCARLATINA broke out in the village in the spring of that year, a few weeks before my sixteenth birthday. There were not many cases, and all were mild, but there was talk of closing the school. My father, for some unknown reason, was against this, and in the end got his own way ; so that about a month later he had the satisfaction of seeing me catch the infection just after everybody else had recovered. I can remember the day I took ill. I had not been feeling well the day before, but had said nothing about it, and on the morning in question went to school as usual. For all the work I did I might as well have stopped at home. I sat there with a book before me, my eyes heavy, my throat dry and painful, and the noise made by the smaller children—to whom Miss McWaters was repeating a stanza of poetry, line by line, while they screamed it after her in high shrill voices—went through and through my head.

I looked at Miss McWaters. She was an excellent teacher and a kind and friendly soul ; but her appearance did not suggest this. Miss McWaters had the unfortunate, the tragic type of ugliness which repels. She was thin and angular ; her gums had receded from her front teeth, leaving them long and pointed, like a rodent's ; her complexion was thick and pallid, her nose red, and her hair stuck out from her forehead in a fuzzy fringe. Long acquaintance with these physical peculiarities had at ordinary times inured me to them, but this morning it was as if I saw them in a new light. I watched her, fascinated, and while I watched, her face seemed to undergo the strangest kaleidoscopic changes. She became a sort of fantastic witch, who was exercising horrible spells upon those small children standing in a circle round her chair. Her mouth grew larger, her long

white teeth seemed eager to bury themselves in their soft little throats. This impression at last became so unpleasantly actual that I had to shake myself and sit back in my seat to get rid of it. Then once more she was only Miss McWaters, to whom years ago I had repeated that same verse of poetry in that same sing-song tone.

I turned away, and gazed round the room. Instantly the white-washed walls, the torn ink-stained maps, the hacked and ink-splashed desks, began to revolve slowly round and round like a wheel. At the other end of the room I saw my father. He held a cane in his hand, with which he was pointing to differently shaped areas on a large blank map of England, while he asked a row of youngsters what counties they represented. It was the kind of lesson I myself had always detested, and I knew from my father's angry : 'Next—next—next' that nobody in the class was giving satisfaction. But a moment later both he and they seemed to shrink and float back, while the room itself shot out like a telescope, and I appeared to be gazing at it from somewhere miles away.

Once more came the thin penetrating cry of Miss McWaters :

*Our bugles sang truce, for the night-cloud had lowered,
And the sentinel stars set their watch in the sky.*

And a dozen still shriller voices echoed :

*Our bugles sang truce, for the night-cloud had lowered,
And the sentinel stars set their watch in the sky.*

The words had a meaning, but it was not their old meaning, and with the vividness of hallucination I saw a big star, with a red nose and a fringe and large white teeth, pointing out the time on a moon-like clock to a lot of little stars, who stood round in a ring and pulled watches out of their pockets and set them to the time told by the moon-clock. Then this vision, too, blinked out, and the schoolroom returned. But my head was throbbing, there was a dull aching at the back of my eye-balls, and I felt I must get into the open air while I could. I crossed the room as quietly as possible. I hoped nobody would notice me, and I don't think anybody did till I reached the door. There, however, I stumbled, nearly pitching through it head first.

at the door. Everything now had grown silent. I could not hear the lamp burning, nor the fire. This silence was surely unusual, unnatural ; and it filled me with a vague disquietude. It grew deeper and deeper, till I could not hear, even when I strained my ears, the faintest murmur either without or within the house. The silence was like a liquid luminous atmosphere through which, I felt, mysterious things were floating nearer. It was like a sea : and with that, straightway, it deepened into colour. I saw a broad dark-blue sea moving in a strange rich light ; and I saw sirens swimming in the warm, swelling waves, appearing and disappearing. They followed a high-pooped fantastic ship, just as I had often seen porpoises following a boat out in the bay. The ship moved slowly, and its broad sails were embroidered with green dragons that shone like fire, and at its bow was a green, jewelled serpent's head. Then it passed out of sight, and once more there was nothing but the shadowy lamplit room.

I heard a faint noise as of someone moving in a chair. Another noise immediately followed, and I started, for this, I realized, was the warning sound one hears when something is about to happen. I watched the handle of the door turn, and the door itself open and close quickly yet stealthily. Three figures had entered. One was a tall figure in brown, with a gun in his gloved hand ; and he was followed by a big brown dog, who at once leaped on to the bed and sat at the foot of it, watching me with sombre, burning eyes. The third figure was Miss McWaters. Her nose was longer and redder than I had ever seen it before, and it kept twitching from side to side in a peculiar fashion. Her big hungry teeth flashed in a grin, and her fringe writhed unpleasantly, as if each individual hair had its own separate life. For the third time I heard the strange little mocking laugh, but could not discover who had uttered it. Perhaps it was Miss McWaters. I knew, at any rate, that she was waiting for me to say something—a verse of poetry. Yes—I remembered :

*Our bugles sang truce, for the night-cloud had lowered,
And the sentinel stars set their watch in the sky.*

Then a dense, heavy darkness swept up, blotting out everything.

Chapter 5

I AWOKE in broad sunlight. The room was full of it, and the scents from the garden floated in through the open windows. For some time I lay there quietly, too languid to make a movement or to speak. Then the door softly opened, and I saw Mrs. Carroll come in and stand beside my bed. 'Is he still asleep?' she asked, for I had closed my eyes. But at this I opened them and looked up at her.

'No,' I answered, smiling.

She smiled too. 'It's time for you to take your medicine,' she said, and the nurse came forward to give it to me. When I had swallowed it, I lay back again among the pillows.

The memory of my convalescence is a peculiar one. It coincided with certain physical changes that were taking place in me, and I fancy must have hastened them. At any rate, they had been only beginning when I fell ill, and now they were completed, and I felt myself to be somehow different. My voice had altered; my mind was coloured by vague and exciting dreams. Sometimes when I turned in bed or stretched myself, the contact of the fine linen sheets against my skin sent a strange, rapid thrill running down my spine. I took a lively and quite new interest in all this, and in my body: I seemed to have discovered a whole new range of sensibilities.

It appeared that I had been very ill indeed. It had not been a simple case of scarlatina; there had been complications—for a day and a night it had been touch-and-go whether or not I should pull through. Yet now I did not feel that I wanted to get well too quickly. The flowers, the fruit, the big bright cheerful room—so different from my room at home—the care that was taken of me, the books that were read to me, the pleasure of being here so securely, with everything just as I liked it and with Mrs. Carroll to look after me—all this was delightful—especially when accompanied by an ever-increasing sense of renewed life, of a kind of physical and emotional spring, the animal counterpart of nature's season of growth and germina-

tion. The one marring note was my father's letter, which I read unsympathetically and then stuffed back into its envelope. It was perhaps a well-intentioned letter, but it was all—and there were pages of it—about my escape, about how near to death I had been, and how he hoped the mercy that had been shown to me would make me think more seriously. I didn't want to think seriously; I wanted to 'bask in the sunshine of these pleasant days while they lasted. If I had died it would have been all over by this time; and since I hadn't died why should I be different? It appeared to me—seeing that I had barely scraped through a severe illness—to be not a time for moping, but for rejoicing. My father talked of a miracle, but I had slender faith in miracles, and still less in the likelihood of one having been performed for my benefit. His entire letter struck me as annoying and tactless, and it was like him, I felt, to try to depress me when everybody else was trying to make me happy.

So my thoughts ran on, though naturally I did not express them to Mrs. Carroll, who was sitting beside my bed, playing patience. She told me my father could not come to see me for fear of carrying the infection, and I heard this with relief. I had secretly been dreading lest he might come, for I knew that if he did there would be prayers in which I should be expected to join, while if I refused to do so there would be reprimands over my hardness of heart. I watched Mrs. Carroll as she sat there, her plump hands drawing out the cards, her eyes earnestly scanning the faces of those already turned up. I could not help smiling. Mrs. Carroll probably said her prayers, I reflected; but she said them in private, and anyhow they wouldn't in the least resemble my father's.

Mrs. Carroll was middle-aged and placid, of a ruddy complexion and inclined to be stout. She must always, even in her earliest youth, have been plain, but her face was filled with so much goodness and kindness that this did not matter. Nor was it the sort of goodness that can be acquired or simulated; it was something that was naturally a part of her, and reflected in all she did and said. Her eyes were small and grey, and she wore gold-rimmed spectacles. I never saw her dressed in anything but black, and with a light lace cap on her grey hair. She was extremely fond of me, and of course I knew it and took advantage of it. But I loved her sincerely, and indeed it would

have been strange if I hadn't. It appeared to me perfectly natural that she should be fond of me: it had always been so; it was a part of the order of things; and I couldn't have imagined anything else. It never even occurred to me that I had no claim upon her except what she herself had established. It never occurred to me that I might in my relation to her have been just like any of the other boys in the village. I accepted the situation precisely as an animal would have done. Once you tell a dog you're fond of him, he believes you, and that's all there is about it; except that inevitably he tries to be a good dog so far as you're concerned; and I tried to be a good dog. I looked upon Derryaghy as if it were a second, and much my best-loved home. Mrs. Carroll wasn't exactly the same as a mother to me, and I wasn't exactly the same as a son to her. Our relation had at once more freedom and was, I think, built on a securer foundation.

The patience failed, and she swept up the cards. 'Would you like me to read to you?' she asked, for I could not read to myself for very long at a time.

She opened *Huckleberry Finn*, and began from where I had left off. It was a book I loved, but I'm not sure that it was Mrs. Carroll's kind of book; I don't believe she even found it funny. She had naturally a slow way of speaking, and it amused me infinitely to here her gentle voice reproducing, or trying to reproduce, the talk of Huck, and Pap, and the King. She amused me quite a lot in all sorts of ways, but this only made me fonder of her; and I know she didn't mind, though sometimes she would ask me what I was laughing at.

That same day, after lunch, the nurse departed. I was getting on very well, and was to be allowed up towards the end of the week. In the afternoon Mrs. Carroll had to go out, and Miss Dick—a sort of unpaying guest, or companion—accompanied her, so that for an hour or two I was left alone. I continued *Huck*, but a couple of chapters brought me to the end. I began another book—*Bevis*—but I was tired of reading. Presently I closed it, and as I lay idle I was seized with a sudden desire to get up. I resisted it for a few minutes, and then, throwing back the bedclothes, slid into a sitting position, with my legs dangling over the edge. They had grown longer, I was sure,

and when I stood up I found that they had also grown rather shaky. I steadied myself, by holding on to the bedpost, until I had acquired more confidence: then I put on a dressing-gown and walked as far as the door.

I turned the handle and looked out into the passage. It was as if I had been ill for months—everything seemed so strange and new. The long corridor, off which the rooms opened, was hung with family portraits, and these appeared, in the mellow sunlight of high, far windows, to be watching me amicably. I liked them; I liked everything about Derryaghy; and now I liked looking down the passage with its long row of closed doors, that in the afternoon stillness seemed so mysterious. I listened, but could hear nothing, for the servants' quarters were far away. I had the whole place to myself, and I had a feeling that I was really the son of the house, that everything about it, its pictures and its ghosts, were mine. I went to a favourite picture and stood beneath it. It was the portrait of a lady with dark hair and dark-blue eyes, and it was partly this peculiar contrast—this contrast of blue eyes and black hair—that had originally pleased me. She was young, and she had a quaint old-fashioned name—Prudence Carroll. The artist had painted her as if she had just come in from the garden, for she still held a bunch of flowers in her hand as she stood by that queer little piano—or spinet—the spinet I now had in my own room. The spinet was open, and in a minute or two she would lay down her flowers and play some air on it, or the accompaniment of a ballad. Perhaps the painter only wanted the brightness of the nosegay for his colour-scheme, perhaps he intended to show that these really were the things she was fondest of—music and flowers. But Prudence Carroll had been dead a hundred years, the notes of her spinet were either cracked or dumb, and her tardy lover had arrived a century too late. She had died unmarried, and only a year after her portrait had been painted. Why had no one cared for her, I wondered? Perhaps some day, between twilight and dusk, she would slip into my room and sing 'Rose Softly Blooming.' A rustle of muslin, a ghostly scent of ghostly flowers, the twangling notes of the spinet, and a voice singing a song that would sound thin and far off, like the sound of the wind.

I stood there, indulging in these fancies, until something

in the silence of closed doors and listening portraits became a little too suggestive, and I returned to the sunshine of my room. I went to the window and, leaning my forehead against the pane, looked out. Far away, I could see a stretch of sand streaked with streams and pools of water, for the tide was out: and beyond the sand, clear in the sunlight, was the sea, blue-green under a soft blue sky, and marked with indigo and purple where the bottom was formed of rocks and seaweed. At the water's edge some boys were sailing boats; but from this distance I could not make out who they were. With trousers rolled up from bare brown legs, with blue jerseys and dark-blue caps, with eager voices which the wind carried to me, they brought me into touch again with life out of doors. I longed to be out there—there or on the sand-hills, where the sparse bleached grass was pale and iridescent in the sun . . . A gardener was mowing the lawn just below my window, and I listened to the sleepy sound of the mowing-machine, and smelled the cool green smell of the freshly cut grass. Then I got back into bed again and took up *Bevis*.

I read for half an hour perhaps, when my eyes once more grew tired. The sound of the mowing-machine had ceased, and a deep slumbrous quiet of late afternoon filled the air. I lay listening to the silence—half-asleep, half-awake—when all at once I heard a scraping sound under my window. Instantly it flashed across my mind that I was quite alone here in this part of the house, and that burglars were taking the opportunity to break in. When they saw me, perhaps they would murder me. The idea—as I half recognized myself—was nonsensical, and never would have occurred to me had I been in my normal health; yet hardly had it entered my head when I saw a ladder shoot up past the window and strike with a grating sound against the wall. My heart began to thump: I was really scared now. I heard steps on the ladder: somebody was mounting it. A moment later Jim's face, brown and ruddy and grinning, popped in at the window, and I gasped with relief. Jim was a boy who worked in the garden, and was about the same age as myself, or a little older. He smiled broadly, and his bright brown eyes gazed at me with evident pleasure. 'How are you, Master Peter?' he grinned. 'They're nobody about, so I thought I'd look in.'

'Oh, I'm all right,' I answered. 'But you mustn't stay there, or you'll be catching the infection.'

'I wanted to see the skin peeling off you,' Jim said innocently. 'What like is it underneath?'

I felt disappointed. Jim's apparent sympathy was after all mere curiosity—and of a rather morbid kind. 'You can't see it,' I answered crossly. 'And you'd better clear out before somebody sees *you* !'

Jim disappeared, but I called after him : 'I say—Jim !'

The round, ruddy-brown face bobbed up again, all smiles and good-humour.

'Will you do something for me ?' I asked.

'Ay,' said Jim. 'What is it ?'

'It's only to play to me. I'm sick of lying here doing nothing.'

Jim's smile slowly faded. 'I darn't, Master Peter,' he faltered. 'Sure you know I darn't. Oul' Thomas'd give me all sorts if he heered me. I be to red up the grass an' rake the walks.'

'Oh, all right,' I told him grumpily, 'It's just like you.'

I took no more notice of Jim, and after lingering a moment or two he again vanished. There was a further scraping noise, and the ladder also disappeared. I lay on, in a kind of waking slumber, till Mrs. Carroll returned.

I must really have dropped asleep after this, for when I opened my eyes it was dusk and, to my surprise, I heard the notes of Jim's flute under my window. A slow simple tune drifted up to me, with an occasional pause, which somehow added to its plaintiveness. I recognized the air—the 'Lorelei.' I had often heard Jim playing it before, but now, in the gathering twilight, it had a curious effect, as if the music and the fading light were in some way mingled. I knew that the unseen musician was Jim, yet none the less the mournful notes, coming slowly in a minor key, were the very spirit of the deepening darkness, and called up within me a world of imaginary sorrows, and a regret for I know not what. Tears gathered in my eyes and ran down my cheeks. Luckily nobody was there to see, for I was ashamed of them, though I realized that they were partly the result of my weakness. Still, it was ridiculous that I should cry over Jim's playing. Jim really couldn't play at all, I told myself—or, at any rate, very little. It was stupid—idiotic : and only the other

day I had cried in this same senseless fashion over a book called *Tim*. I had gone on reading it, and while I was reading had wept my soul out in an ecstasy of love and misery.

When Jim's performance came to an end I lay on in the darkness—my tears drying on my cheeks—and thought what a fool I was. Why should I have cried? What was the matter with me? It was not that I was unhappy: on the contrary, I was extremely happy. But somehow I felt dimly that there was a greater happiness than any I had yet experienced, or probably ever should experience. The meaning of my emotions and desires was not quite clear to me, though I seemed on the verge of discovery. There was something stirring within me to which I could not give freedom, something which remained unsatisfied even in the midst of my keenest pleasures. A kind of homesickness, perhaps, for dreamland; nothing more substantial than that. But I was pleased and touched that Jim should have come back to play to me. It was very nice of him, I thought, and showed how I had misjudged him . . .

On a bright morning early in June I was allowed out for the first time since my illness, and I insisted on going alone. I did not go far, because the woods were all round the house, and I merely wanted to be in them. The green paths stretched in front of me in the rich light and shadow of early summer. I don't think I had ever before fully realized how beautiful this world is. I lay down on my back on the warm dry moss and listened to a skylark singing as he mounted up from the fields near the sea into the dark clear sky. It was the passionate music of life itself—joyous and free. It was a kind of leaping, exulting ecstasy—a bright rapture that was the very opposite of Jim's melancholy tune. And then a strange experience befell me. It was as if everything that a moment before had been all around me and external were now suddenly within me. The whole world was within me. It was within me that the trees waved their green branches; it was within me that the skylark was singing; it was within me that the hot sun shone, and that the shade was cool. A cloud rose in the sky and passed in a light shower that pattered on the leaves, and I felt its freshness dropping into my spirit: and I felt in all my being the smell and life and strength of the earth, and the grass, and the plants

I could have sobbed for joy, but in the midst of it I heard the sound of footsteps, and looked behind me quickly, to see the figure of one of the two idiots who lived in a hovel outside the village, approaching. This was the man : there was a woman also—his sister. He was perfectly harmless ; probably he had been up at the house begging ; and he drew near now with smiles meant to be ingratiating. He held an empty pipe in his hand, and made guttural noises that I knew were asking for tobacco. I told him I had none, but he would not go away. He stood over me, a grin on his deformed face. The big misshapen head, the slobbering mouth, the stupid persistence—all filled me with a kind of cold rage. He had spoiled everything ; I hated him and could have killed him for it. But he still stood there and jibbered with his ugly dripping mouth. It was only when I struck at him with a stick that he moved off, glancing back timidly at every step. And when he was gone, though I was ashamed, I felt chiefly disgust and aversion. All the beauty had gone out of the woods, and all the joy out of the skylark's song. I got up and went home.

Chapter 6

WHEN, towards the end of July, Mrs. Carroll told me that she had invited her nephew and niece, Gerald and Katherine Dale, to come on a visit to Derryaghy, I became at once very curious to see them. I had never even heard of them before, and now learned that they lived in London, were twins, and of about my own age, or perhaps a year older—Mrs. Carroll could not remember. They arrived a few days later, and that night I went to dinner to meet them.

As it happened, I was late. My watch had stopped for half an hour in the afternoon, and then gone on again, an annoying trick it sometimes played me. The maid who opened the door told me that they were already in the dining-room, but that dinner had only just started. The clock in the hall told me that they must have waited a good while before beginning.

The prospect of meeting strangers always made me shy, and to-night, because I was so late, and partly perhaps because

these particular strangers were so nearly my own age, I was shyer than usual. I did not look at either of them as I entered the room where, though there was still plenty of daylight, two softly shaded lamps burned amid a profusion of flowers upon the white and silver table. I shook hands with Mrs. Carroll and Miss Dick, and had begun to stammer out a long and involved explanation of the cause of my delay when the former cut me short by introducing me to the Dales. I said 'How-do-you-do?', blushed, and took my place beside Katherine, with Gerald directly opposite.

I should never have guessed that they were brother and sister, let alone twins, for no two people could have been less alike. Katherine pleased me at once. She was fresh and bright and attractive, with a suggestion of the open air about her. At any rate that was what I thought. If I had been a poet, and describing her in a poem, my similes would all have been taken from nature—from the sea and the hills and the sky. But it was chiefly her expression that attracted me. Even while we were being introduced her dark yet immensely blue eyes had seemed to strike some chord of memory, and now I sat puzzling over where I could have seen them before. Of course I *hadn't* seen them—that was impossible—yet the impression remained, she reminded me of someone. I thought she looked simple, pleasant, unaffected—and not particularly clever. Her brother, on the other hand, probably *was* clever, and certainly not simple. Also his personal beauty was more striking than Katherine's, though definitely peculiar. He was slim and brown-skinned, and his features were delicate, though neither weak nor effeminate. But there was something in the way he looked at you that did not help to set you at your ease. I can't define it exactly—it was not superciliousness—perhaps, indeed, I only imagined it. 'Peter will be able to show you everything and take you everywhere,' Mrs. Carroll told them; and Katherine immediately inquired if I played golf.

I said I didn't, adding rather feebly that my father wouldn't allow me to join the club. This was a little unfair, and moreover not strictly true. For though it is extremely unlikely that he *would* have allowed me—since there was a bar in the clubhouse, and he strongly disapproved of bars—I had never so much as mentioned the matter to him, nor indeed, till that moment,

felt the slightest inclination to play golf. Suddenly I caught Gerald's eyes watching me with an expression of interest, and I blushed again. They were very strange eyes—even their colour was strange—something between amber and hazel, and shot through with streaks of reddish-brown. There was just the ghost of a smile on his lips, and I could not help suspecting that he was faintly tickled by my excuse. 'Do you play?' I asked him brusquely.

He looked surprised, and not in the least put out. 'No,' he answered, laughing.

Mrs. Carroll must have been surprised too, for she glanced at me quickly. 'Gerald is studying abroad,' she said. 'At Vienna—where I don't suppose they've ever heard of golf. He has taken up music, you know, I mean, as a profession.'

As a matter of fact I did know it; we all knew it; it had been discussed at considerable length more than once, and the wisdom of his parents in permitting such a thing questioned. But Miss Dick exclaimed quite as if she had never heard it before: 'How interesting! Fancy, Vienna!'

Miss Dick was a distant relation of Mrs. Carroll's, and I suppose a poor one. Otherwise she would hardly have been settled permanently at Derryagh in the position that she occupied. For she was not Mrs. Carroll's sort, therefore it cannot have been for the sake of her society that she was there, nor was it precisely clear what *useful* purpose she fulfilled. Miss Dick was a foolish scatter-brained creature, of impulsive and gushing affections, which, I ought to add, had never been bestowed upon me. She was, and always had been, jealous of me, I thought; though she did her best to hide this, and doubtless, so far as Mrs. Carroll was concerned, succeeded. She had a high colour, high cheek-bones, sharp features, and bright little eyes strangely devoid of expression. These, with the quick jerky movements of her head, gave her an absurd resemblance to a lean and restless hen. Nor was the resemblance entirely physical. She had the same type of mind—fussy, irrational, well-meaning—and at times intensely irritating. She began now to ask about Vienna, saying, and possibly believing, that she had always longed to visit that city. Nobody disputed the statement. It was the sort of thing Miss Dick invariably did say—and forgot as soon as she had said it. It wasn't intended

to convince ; still less to deceive : in fact it had no meaning whatever, or at most meant only that she had taken a fancy to Gerald.

Mrs. Carroll changed the subject without ceremony. 'We've had the piano specially tuned for you,' she told her nephew ; who replied politely that she shouldn't have bothered.

'You evidently don't know what it was like before,' I was beginning to say, but abruptly stopped.

Nobody took any notice, except Gerald, who laughed ; while Miss Dick seized the opportunity to continue her own remarks. She abandoned Vienna, however, though she still clung to music. She mentioned that her mother had heard Patti in *La Sonnambula*, and that when this great soprano, apparently in the middle of the opera, had sung 'Home, Sweet Home,' the entire house had risen to its feet in enthusiasm. 'It has always seemed to me that music is the most perfect of the arts,' Miss Dick concluded graciously.

'Painting is the most perfect of the arts,' I contradicted. It was quite as foolish a pronouncement as Miss Dick's, and it had the additional disadvantage of sounding rude. Therefore I immediately tried to justify it. 'You can look at a picture oftener than you can listen to a piece of music,' I said. 'Without getting tired of it, I mean. Oftener, too, than you can read a book.'

In my turn I had addressed Gerald, who answered suavely : 'I dare say'—and again there was a silence.

I wished I had not spoken. I only *had* spoken because I was nervous. 'Why can't he stand up for his own job !' I thought angrily. 'And why is it a crime to say what you believe !'

I glanced at Katherine, and tried to think of a pleasant remark, but couldn't. Throughout the remainder of dinner I hardly opened my lips.

When we went to the drawing-room, it looked as if Miss Dick had planned a musical evening, for she at once sat down at the piano with all the air of a person opening a concert. She played an arrangement of something or other, by Thalberg. Most of Miss Dick's pieces were arrangements or fantasias, and it was a feature of them that the beginning of the end could be heard about a couple of pages off, in a series of frantic rushes

up and down the keyboard, with much crossing of hands. She had been practising this particular thing all week, and she played now with a fierce concentration on the task to be accomplished, her face getting redder as Thalberg became more surprising. Her mouth was slightly screwed up at one corner, through which just the tip of her tongue was visible ; her eyes devoured the sheet of music before her ; and every now and then she made a grab at it with her left hand—for she would never trust anybody to turn the pages for her.

When she had struck the last three bangs there was a general sigh of relief. ' My dear, I don't know how you do it ! ' Mrs. Carroll murmured, almost as breathless as the performer.

' It does take it out of one,' Miss Dick panted cheerfully.

And suddenly—I don't know why—I liked her ; and at the same time wanted to laugh. She really was a decent soul in her own way. She turned to Gerald, who was leaning back in his chair, his hands in his trousers pockets, and his gaze fixed on the ceiling. ' Won't you play something now ? ' she asked. ' That was only meant as an introduction to set things going.'

Gerald started slightly—I believe on purpose. ' Not just yet, I think. If you don't mind, I'd rather smoke a cigarette first.' And with that he got up and strolled out through one of the open french windows, leaving us all staring after him.

It was pretty cool ! I thought ; and Katherine must have thought so too, for I saw her glance uneasily at Mrs. Carroll. But Mrs. Carroll seemed to be absorbed in her work—a pair of socks she was knitting for me.

When, I suppose, he considered that the echoes awakened by Miss Dick had had time to subside, Gerald returned, and began to fiddle with the music-stool, screwing it up and down. Apparently it was difficult to get it right, and even after he had done so he still seemed in no hurry to begin. Or at least that was all he did do—playing the first few bars of half a dozen things and then abruptly dropping them. I saw Katherine give him a significant frown, but he frowned exaggeratedly back, and she coloured. Mrs. Carroll stopped knitting for a moment and looked at him too. Was he behaving like this deliberately, I wondered ? She seemed to think so, and I was inclined to agree with her. Nevertheless, he had not struck more than a note or two before I knew that I had never heard

the piano really played till now. In spite of myself I felt the vague sense of hostility he had somehow aroused in me slipping away as I listened : and then he stopped suddenly, and this time conclusively, for he got up from the music-stool and walked over to the window where I sat.

‘You haven’t altered, Gerald,’ said Mrs. Carroll drily.

‘Do you mean my playing, Aunt Clara ?’ he replied in a slightly drawling tone. ‘It’s supposed to have improved’ a little, though I’m afraid it wasn’t very good to-night.’

Mrs. Carroll said no more, but I guessed from the way her lips tightened that she was not in love with her nephew. I expect he guessed it also, though it did not appear to trouble him. Miss Dick’s cat jumped on to his knee and he began to stroke it. There was something in his imperturbability which, though I felt it to be based on a sense of superiority to everybody else present, I could not help admiring—just as I could not help admiring his playing, little as we had heard of it. I believe he knew what I was thinking, but then he always gave me that impression, and usually, as I was to discover later, it was the right one. Miss Dick begged him to play again, but he refused. Next moment, without moving his lips, and in so low a voice that the others could not possibly have heard him, he asked : ‘Would you like me to ?’

I shook my head. I *should* have liked it, but I wasn’t going to tell him this, for it struck me that he was a great deal too conceited already. Besides, if he could play now, he could have played before : the whole thing must have been a pose. And yet I wasn’t certain : I felt I did not understand him. ‘I’ll play to you some time when the others aren’t there,’ he went on in the same undertone. ‘It’s no good now. Can’t you see that ?’

‘Why ?’ I demanded, without lowering my voice.

He smiled, but his manner immediately changed. ‘Well—for one thing, because I don’t want to,’ he said. ‘I’d like to go out. Could we, do you think ?’

‘No,’ I answered, and very soon afterwards got up and crossed the room to where Katherine was sitting.

I did this impulsively, my intention being to snub Gerald ; but as things turned out it proved a singularly unwise step, for once I had seated myself I found that I had nothing to say.

It was really very painful, and the fact that I had so deliberately come over, only to sit there like a wooden image, increased my confusion. I felt that everybody was gazing at me ; I felt that Katherine would think me a fool. I must say something, no matter what, and in desperation I blurted out the only words that occurred to me : ' Do you play golf ? '

Not till they had passed my lips did I fully realize their inanity. Then I could have kicked myself. But Katherine answered ' Yes,' as if she were quite unconscious that the subject had been discussed before. Unfortunately her answer was confined to that word only. There she stopped—leaving me to rack my brains anew. It was no use ; a malignant spell appeared to have been cast upon me ; I was incapable of speech. I felt my body breaking out into a sweat ; each minute was like an hour ; yet still I could think of nothing except that wretched golf. Katherine began to talk to Mrs. Carroll and Miss Dick ; while, perched in my conspicuous position beside her, I grew more and more uncomfortable, yet was too shy to get up and move away. And suddenly I became conscious that my hands and feet were enormous. I thrust my hands out of sight into my trousers pockets, but my feet remained visible. I became conscious of my cheap ready-made clothes—so different from Gerald's. I was sure I must be different in every way from the kind of people they both were accustomed to. I knew my thick nose had neither shape nor character, that my coarse brown hair was of a kind that grows more commonly on the trunks of certain tropical trees than on the human head, and that my eyes and mouth had a sullen expression. In the midst of it all I saw Gerald watching me with what I believed to be a veiled amusement. My shyness turned to rage—rage with myself, rage with him, rage, I'm afraid, even with Katherine. An hour earlier than I had intended to, I got up to say good-night.

Mrs. Carroll appeared to have noticed nothing. On the other hand, she *may* have noticed, for she did not try to keep me. ' We'll expect you to-morrow, Peter,' she said, and turned to her niece. ' What would you like to do to-morrow ? Or would you rather leave it open, and decide in the morning ? '

Katherine smiled at me as if we were old friends. ' I think I'd like to climb one of the mountains,' she said. ' I planned that the minute I saw them.'

‘In that case you ought to start early,’ Mrs. Carroll told her. ‘The morning’s the best time ; and if it’s a really fine day you could take your lunch with you. Peter knows all the different walks for miles around.’

I was on the point of inventing an excuse, an engagement, but luckily overcame the temptation. Nobody would have believed me—Mrs. Carroll least of all. So I promised to call for them soon after breakfast, and began saying my good-nights.

‘I’m coming with you,’ Gerald murmured, as I turned to him. ‘I want a walk and it’s quite early.’

Chapter 7

I LIKED him better when we were alone together, but I was still shy, still puzzled by him ; he still struck me as being different from anybody I had ever met. In addition, I got the impression that he *wanted* me to like him, which was in itself a new and surprising experience. At all events he seemed determined to make himself agreeable, and our walk was pleasant enough, though the moment he left me, at the corner of the Bryansford Road, I began again to feel cross and dissatisfied.

This was partly due to the way things had gone at Derryagh—to my own shyness and awkwardness—but partly, also, to an anticipation of what awaited me at home. More than anything else in the world, perhaps, I hated and dreaded that atmosphere of dullness and joylessness which hung like a perpetual mist over our house. It chilled and depressed me ; it seemed even to sap my vitality ; and with all the strength I could summon up I tried to resist it. It was as if the narrowness and gloom, the grey monotonous melancholy of my father’s existence, had a power of penetrating into my brain like the fumes of a drug : there were times when I had a feeling that I was struggling for life.

He was in the parlour when I entered. He glanced up at the clock, which meant that he was surprised at my having returned before bedtime, but he made no remark. I sat down to take off my shoes ; then I got the book I was reading. My father meanwhile had not spoken a word, and I had returned

him silence for silence. Sometimes, after a whole evening of this kind of thing, my feeling of constraint would become so acute that the effort required to say even good-night would be almost insurmountable, and if I could I would slip out of the room and upstairs to bed without doing so.

My father was correcting exercises. The books were arranged in two piles in front of him—those he had already finished with, and those he had not yet touched. Behind him was the wall, with its cheap ugly flowered paper and illuminated texts. I glanced at him from time to time over the top of my book. There was a perpetual dinginess in his appearance ; his linen was rarely scrupulously clean, and his nails never were. Just now I wanted to ask him to stop snuffling. How could I read while he kept on making such noises ! He had a peculiar way of breathing through his nose so as to produce a whistling sound. Sometimes, to avoid hearing him, I had gone upstairs and sat in an ice-cold bedroom till he had called me down again. He would want to know what I had been doing, why I was sitting by myself, and of course I couldn't tell him. Besides, I was wasting candles or oil. To-night I tried stopping my ears with my fingers.

Suddenly he looked up over his spectacles and addressed me solemnly across the table. 'I intended to ask you about that book . . . Who gave it to you ?'

My goodness ! What had I done now ! The book was a volume of Shakespeare, and on that account, if on no other, one would have supposed immune from criticism. 'Nobody gave it to me,' I answered. 'I borrowed it.'

'Why . . . ? Why can't you read what other boys read ?'

'But it's Shakespeare !' I exclaimed, staring at him incredulously.

'I know it's Shakespeare,' said my father. 'And that's why I ask what you are reading.'

'Shakespeare,' I replied.

I dare say it was irritating. My father pushed away his exercise books and for a moment or two sat regarding me. 'You are not answering my question,' he then said.

I answered it now, and indeed held out the book towards him so that he could see for himself. '*Venus and Adonis*,' I told him.

‘Why have you chosen *Venus and Adonis*?’ he persisted, his eyes still fixed on my face. And, as I remained silent: ‘Why should you pick out the poems to read, when there are all the plays?’

‘I’d rather have poems than plays,’ I mumbled. ‘What harm is there in it?’

But this was an unwise speech, for it gave my father precisely the opening he desired. ‘The harm is that it is filled with all kinds of voluptuous thoughts and scenes,’ he said peremptorily; ‘quite unsuitable for a boy of your age.’ He paused for a moment, and then added: ‘You have been too much at Derryaghy lately.’

I gazed at him without replying. The train of association which connected voluptuous thoughts and scenes with Derryaghy seems now distinctly comic, but at the time it didn’t. Yet I was not particularly surprised that he had come out there. He usually did, sooner or later, and ever since my illness his attitude had been increasingly puzzling. I mean, I could not understand what his real feeling was concerning Mrs. Carroll and the interest she took in me. It certainly was not the one he expressed. Behind a superficial acknowledgment of her kindness there seemed to lurk something grudging and disapproving which, though he suppressed it, and of course would have denied its existence, really coloured everything he said. On the other hand, he allowed me to remain under countless obligations to her. It was she, for example, who would be paying for me when I went to my new school after the summer; and she who would be paying, later on, my university expenses. That had been definitely settled between them, during an interview of which I received only a very bald and abbreviated account. I believe, really, a secret struggle was perpetually going on within him—a struggle between his consciousness of my interests and a desire to tell her to mind her own business and leave him to look after his son for himself. This unhappy blend of disapproval, a fear to give offence, and a reluctant sense of obligation, was hardly calculated to produce a very gracious attitude on his part when they met. Nor did it. Luckily their meetings were few, and perhaps she understood and made allowances. Nevertheless, I don’t think she liked him.

At all events I knew it was quite useless to point out that I

had been no more frequently at Derryagh of late than at any other time during the past six years, so I said nothing.

'Now that Mrs. Carroll has her nephew and niece staying with her,' he went on, 'there can be no need for you to go so often. She will invite you when she wants you. I was glad to see that you came home early to-night.'

The last words were added in a more conciliatory tone—as a kind of sop—but they did not deceive me. I knew what they concealed, though he may not have known himself. 'Why don't you like her?' I asked.

I had never spoken so plainly before, and he fixed a stern gaze upon me. 'Why don't I like whom?'

'Mrs. Carroll.'

'Mrs. Carroll!' His eyes, under their shaggy brows, darkened ominously. 'I don't think I understand you!'

'Oh yes you do,' I felt inclined to contradict him, but resisted the impulse, and after a brief hesitation he returned to his exercises. All the same, I knew that an irrepressible desire to justify himself was working in his mind, and very soon it broke out. 'You don't appear to realize that such a question accuses me of both ingratitude and hypocrisy . . . ! Or possibly that was your intention?'

I did not answer. I could see that he was deeply offended—and very much annoyed into the bargain—yet I was rather glad than otherwise. 'I think I'll go to bed,' I announced, getting up.

He would not let me go. With an impatient gesture he kept me waiting there, while he continued to look down at his papers, and even to turn over a page or two. But this was only a means of gaining time; he was thinking of something else, I knew, and probably deciding on the course he ought to take. At any rate, when he spoke again, it was in a less dictatorial tone. 'Mrs. Carroll is different from people like us,' he said. 'Because she has shown kindness to you, and takes an interest in you, you mustn't forget that. Her position in life is different from ours, and naturally her view of life is different also. If I may say so, it can hardly help being—in some respects at least—more worldly.'

'Is she very worldly?' I asked—for anybody less so I could hardly imagine.

But my father branched off in another direction. 'To-night, at dinner, were you offered wine?'

So here was the worldliness—or one of its manifestations. Dining late on Sundays I knew to be another. 'I had a glass of claret,' I replied.

He glanced up quickly. 'You remembered what I had told you—that I would rather you didn't take anything?'

'No,' I muttered.

'Peter!'

'Well, I didn't. Or at least I didn't think it was worth while making a fuss. I wasn't thinking of what you told me.'

'I see,' he answered.

'You don't see. You always want me to behave differently from other people.'

'I'm not aware that I did anything more than let you know what would please me,' he returned coldly. 'I left you entirely free.'

'How can you call it leaving me free,' I spluttered angrily, 'when you're for ever wanting to know if I've done things? You expect me to do them, you ask me if I've done them, and then, if I *have* done them, you get annoyed.'

He took no notice of this outburst except to ask: 'Did you make any arrangement about going there again?'

'Yes,' I said. 'I promised to go to-morrow—after breakfast.'

'What for?'

'I don't know what for. Mrs. Carroll wants me to take the Dales somewhere—that's all.'

He stared gloomily before him, the end of a pencil pressed against his lips. 'Can't they find their own way about!' he said impatiently. 'It's not very difficult.'

'Does that mean I'm not to go?'

He wouldn't say what it meant: at least not in so many words. 'You can't be always going there,' he prevaricated. 'You seem to me to live there.'

'It's easier than living at home,' I muttered, but either he did not hear or pretended not to hear.

'I don't want you to be making yourself a nuisance to strangers.'

I didn't believe him: I knew that that had nothing to do

with it, though I had only a dim notion of what his actual reason was. 'Aren't they the best judges of whether I'm a nuisance or not?' I said. 'They asked me : or at least Mrs. Carroll did.'

He waited a moment, and then pronounced finally : 'Well, I don't wish you to go to-morrow.'

He had said it at last, and, in spite of what had gone before, it took me by surprise. In fact, it seemed to me so unwarrantable—so stupid, if nothing else—that for a moment it drove all other thoughts out of my head and I forgot that only a little earlier I hadn't particularly wished to go myself. Now I was determined to do so, and stood frowning and glowering at him. 'What reason have you?' I demanded in a choked voice, which none the less must have conveyed a good deal of what I was feeling, for he gave me a long look in return.

'I hope you don't intend to be as disrespectful as your manner suggests,' he said. 'If I had no other reason for not wanting you to go, I should have a very good one in the way it seems to make you behave when you come back. I *have* another reason, however. I don't wish you to grow up with the idea that you have nothing to think of in life but your own pleasures.'

His tone was dispassionate enough, he did not raise his voice ; yet behind it I was aware of an inexpugnable obstinacy, and it was this that filled me with resentment. 'What have I been doing?' I asked, swallowing quickly.

'It isn't what you have been doing : you rarely tell me what you have been doing : it is your whole manner and attitude,' my father said. 'You seem to think that I have no right to question you, no right to interfere with you ; that I ought to leave you absolutely independent—free to go and come just as you please ; that you have no duties either to me or to anybody else. You are becoming utterly selfish.'

Selfish ! So that was it. And what was he ? I asked myself bitterly—with his idea of making everybody think and act exactly after his own fashion ! He was not merely selfish ; he was jealous too. That was what lay behind all this cross-examination. Only he never realized his own faults : he found moral justifications for them instead. One thing was certain, I was going to Derryaghy to-morrow whether he forbade me or

not I was so full of these thoughts that I made no attempt to interrupt what followed, for he continued his lecture, pointing out that I should have my living to earn, my way to make in the world, that I shouldn't always have Mrs Carroll behind me, and that the fewer expensive tastes and habits I acquired the more chance I should have of being happy in the very humble station I was likely to occupy in life

If he really wanted to make me feel humble, he could hardly have gone about it in a wiser way. To begin with, humility wasn't in my nature, I had no doubt at all as to the superior quality of my intelligence. What he actually did do was to make me forget all the clumsiness and shyness I had shown earlier that evening, and as soon as I was in bed I began, in a mood of violent opposition, to compose a drama, with Katherine Dale as heroine and myself as hero. Katherine, to be sure, was but a moon shining with a pale and reflected glory, but this did not occur to me, since that glory was mine. I had braved my father's anger in order to be with her, and now I was no longer shy, the right words rushed from me in a torrent. It was a love story—it was moreover a happy one—though that might hardly have been guessed from the nature of its plot. The truth is, I had devoured recently several novels by Rhoda Broughton—fat dark-green books that I had found up at Derryagh—and these supplied the material for my imagination to use as I lay there in my small room, with a text above my head. I was very far indeed from desiring to 'keep innocency'. On the contrary, I was disillusioned, cynical, with half a dozen burnt-out passions behind me, and Katherine loved me. Poor Katherine, *she* was innocent enough—it was in the part—and instead of her own frank blue eyes I had given her eyes like a shot partridge. No amount of repetition could stifle our romance, though the variations introduced were slight. We met, we fell in love, there was a fatal misunderstanding and we parted. I married somebody else—a cold soulless woman of the world, 'with magnificent shoulders', and Katherine sometimes went into a consumption, and sometimes did not but in either case there was a last meeting between us when the veils of falsehood were torn aside, and for one fierce moment I held her passionately in my arms, my lips pressed on hers. It was these fierce, passionate moments in Miss Broughton's

tales that so appealed to me. She was a little parsimonious with them, I thought ; but in my own version they followed one another thick and fast as raindrops in a thunder-shower. Climax succeeded climax, till the room was brimmed up with lovers' vows and embraces—meetings, reconciliations, and eternal farewells. By this time I myself was in a sweat. I threw off most of the bedclothes : the darkness quivered with emotion. All the same, never, perhaps, had the text above my head been obeyed more literally.

Chapter 8

I WAS awakened in the morning by Remus scratching at my door. Still half asleep, I rose to let him in, and then returned to bed, where he had already taken the most comfortable place. He looked at me for a minute or two before shutting his round dark eyes and setting up a loud snoring. I was too lazy to get up and dress, though it was time to do so, but sat hugging my knees and watching him. Like all bulldogs, he had an endearing quaintness of character, and an understanding that was nearly human. His beauty was at once strange and delightful—the kind of beauty one associates with the work of Chinese and Japanese artists, though Leonardo would have made a drawing of him. In colour he was white, decorated with brindle patches. He had a wide deep chest, a broad head, a flat black nose, wrinkles, loose velvety flews, and silky flapping ears soft as the petals of a rose. But it was his eyes, dark and lovely, with a profound innocence and trustfulness floating in them, that gave his whole face the expression I loved. As a pup, able to walk and no more, he had been a birthday present from Mrs. Carroll : now he weighed about sixty pounds and was three years old.

While I sat gazing at him, I tried to make up my mind whether to say anything further about going to Derryaghy. In spite of last night's defiance I knew well enough that when it came to the point it would really be impossible for me deliberately to disobey my father. I might want to do so, and say I would do so, but all I should actually do would be to sit at home and sulk. In the end I decided to make no more fuss.

‘I’ll have to go up to the house and say that I can’t come,’ I told him after breakfast. He had risen from the table, and was in the act of taking down our Bibles from the bookshelf, preparatory to ‘worship’—a ceremony which took place every morning and evening, and which consisted in my reading aloud a chapter from the Bible, and in my father making a prayer. Sometimes he commented on what I read, explained a verse, drew a lesson from it—interruptions I secretly resented as tending to prolong ‘worship’—sometimes he listened in silence.

He put my Bible down now beside my tea-cup before replying. Then, when he had resumed his seat and fumbled with his spectacle-case, he said : ‘You may go with the Dales : I have been thinking it over.’

I answered nothing, though I had an uncomfortable feeling that thanks might be expected. They would certainly have been more gracious, but a kind of awkwardness held me dumb. I wondered what would happen if I were to tell him I didn’t want to go, that I would never go again, that I would rather stay here with him quite alone and free from all worldly temptations. He would like it ; might even be very much moved. It was really the most perfect opportunity imaginable for a thoroughly sentimental scene, like those in the stories he used to read to me. I pictured how it would there be wrung out to the last drop of sloppiness, and promptly followed by my conversion, or even death-bed. ‘I think it’s the ninth chapter of Isaiah,’ my father observed.

‘I read the ninth yesterday,’ I answered meekly. ‘It’s the tenth.’

My father turned another page and I began.

‘“Woe unto them that decree unrighteous decrees” . . .’

I felt my cheeks suddenly growing hot, and really the words did seem extraordinary apt to the decree about my not going to Derryaghy. I did not look at my father, but keeping my eyes glued to the page went on. The rest of the chapter fortunately was less penitent.

‘“He is come to Aiath, he is passed to Migron ; at Michmash he hath laid up his carriages :

‘“They are gone over the passage : they have taken up their lodging at Geba ; Ramah is afraid ; Gibeah of Saul is fled.

“Lift up thy voice, O daughter of Gallim ; cause it to be heard unto Laish, O poor Anathoth.

“Madmenah is removed ; the inhabitants of Gebim gather themselves to flee . . .”

It was not wildly exciting in itself, and I cannot pretend that my reading of it made it more so. The only good point about it was that it did not lend itself to exegesis. The kind of thing my father pounced on was : ‘Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters.’ Then he would interrupt me to point out : ‘That means, when our masters tell us to do what is right. If we are told to do something we know to be wrong, we must refuse to obey.’

When I had finished we knelt down before our chairs. My father prayed aloud, and I stared out of the window and tried to make up my mind about the best place for our picnic. The prayer came in jerks, and between the sentences my father, as usual, kept crossing and uncrossing his feet, and scraping them together, as if he were trying to remove a tight pair of shoes. It seemed odd to me that he could pray so earnestly and at the same time use such artificial language, crammed with ‘thees’ and ‘thous,’ ‘hearests’ and ‘doests.’ Near the end he inserted his favourite petition : ‘Open Thou our eyes, O Lord, so that we may see the exceeding sinfulness of sin’—a request which, coming from him, had always struck me as singularly superfluous. His sense of the exceeding sinfulness of sin—especially of *my* particular sins—was quite lively enough, I thought. But it didn’t matter. Before he had well reached ‘Amen’ I was on my feet, dusting the knees of my trousers.

Chapter 9

A QUARTER of an hour later, as I walked up to Derryagh, Willie Breen, the grocer’s son, a little boy of ten or eleven ran out from the shop and, after gazing carefully up and down the road, slipped a small piece of paper into my hand. One side of this paper had been carefully blackened ; on the other a single word, ‘Friday,’ was printed in red ink. I put it in my pocket and walked on without making a sign or uttering

any word ; and in equal silence Willie returned to the shop.

Since I wasn't at all sure what our programme would be, I had left Remus at home with my father ; and when I reached the house, though I had been intending all along to ask for Katherine, I suddenly asked for Gerald instead.

'Gerald isn't down yet,' Mrs. Carroll informed me, coming into the hall from the dining-room. 'Probably he's not even out of bed. You'd better go up and tell him to hurry : he's in the room next yours . . . Katherine,' she added, 'is making sandwiches.'

Rather reluctantly I obeyed these instructions and, climbing the stairs, tapped at Gerald's door. 'Come in,' called a sleepy voice.

He was indeed still in bed, and in spite of my advent seemed in no hurry to get out of it. 'Oh, it's you is it ?' he murmured, stretching his arms above his head and blinking at me. 'Good morning.'

'Good morning,' I replied, trying to imitate the casual tone he had used. 'I was told to tell you to hurry.'

He sat up and yawned. 'It's late, I suppose . . . They hadn't sense enough to send me up my breakfast.'

'Do you usually have breakfast in your room ?' I asked.

He looked out of the window as if I didn't interest him. 'No,' he answered, after a perceptible pause, 'but I have it in my room when I want to.'

I felt snubbed. I didn't know whether to stay or to go, but he decided the matter by telling me to wait till he had taken his bath. He put on a dressing-gown and left the room. But when he came back I didn't know why he had asked me to stay, for he began to dress without taking the slightest notice of me. I sat on the edge of the bed and watched him. It annoyed me that I should feel the way I did—diffident and shy. After all, he was only a year older than I was, so why should I allow him to impress me ? Nevertheless, he did impress me ; he made me feel awkward and loutish—while at the same time I was conscious of a vehement desire to impress *him*.

He dressed very quickly, yet the result was just as harmonious as it had been last night. His clothes were of a light brown colour that was exactly the same shade as his hair and a little darker than his skin. A pale violet tie was loosely knotted over a cambric shirt. His forehead was broad ; his eyes were

set widely apart ; his nose was straight and his mouth extraordinarily delicate. All this I had noticed yesterday, but I noticed it again this morning. Even his ears seemed to me to be beautifully shaped. His skin was of a golden-brown colour, but clear almost to transparency, and a tiny blue vein was faintly visible on his left temple, running from the slender eyebrow to the cheekbone. When he listened his brows wrinkled slightly. I would have given a good deal to have looked like him.

Suddenly in the mirror I caught his eyes watching me. They had an odd light in them of suppressed amusement. 'Do you know you were extremely rude to me yesterday?' he said, without turning round.

I coloured and had nothing to reply. I knew that for some strange reason (strange, because I didn't think it was ill natured) it pleased him to make me look and feel shy. He smiled and patted me on the shoulder. 'Well, I forgive you . . . I'm ready now. Come along.'

This air, however, of treating me as if I were a small boy, did not suit me at all. 'Why couldn't you play properly when you were asked?' I retorted bluntly. 'You were just as rude as I was, and you were rude on purpose.'

He was half-way downstairs, but he stopped short, swung round, and I had to stop too. 'We'd better get this right,' he said, 'though I told you at the time. I would have played if there had been anybody to play to. Who was there? Neither Katherine nor Aunt Clara knows 'Come Back to Erin' from the 'Moonlight Sonata.' That absurd Dick person had just given *her* conception of playing. There remained you : and you sat looking as if you wished you were anywhere else in the world except where you were. I'll play for you when we're alone. And now I must have breakfast : I won't keep you long.' He broke off abruptly to stare at Katherine, who had suddenly appeared, carrying a large basket. 'What's all that for?' he asked, frowning.

'For lunch, naturally,' Katherine replied. 'We're not going to starve ourselves. Good morning, Peter.'

'Evidently *you're* not,' Gerald said. 'We can each take our own lunch : a basket like that is only going to be a nuisance.'

'You needn't carry it,' Katherine told him. 'You and I will carry it by turns,' she said to me.

He shrugged his shoulders 'What's the use of talking like that ' It doesn't mean anything If that hamper has to be dragged all the way, I'm not going' And he departed to the dining-room, leaving Katherine and me standing in the hall, the 'hamper,' between us

It wasn't really a hamper, of course, but I thought myself it was on the large side 'We needn't take any drinkables,' I began, 'there'll be plenty of water'

'I've packed three thermos-flasks,' Katherine answered quietly, 'and I'm not going to unpack them' From her tone I decided to say nothing more

We sat down in the porch to wait for Gerald In spite of his promise we had to wait some time When eventually he rejoined us—which he did very leisurely—I glanced at his shoes, and suggested that he should change them for something more substantial

He raised his eyebrows 'Why? We're not going through ploughed fields, are we? I haven't any hobnails even if we were' A panama hat shaded his face and somehow I knew at once that we should have difficulty in getting him any distance

'Why aren't we driving?' it suddenly occurred to him 'It would be much better to drive'

'We can't drive over mountains,' said Katherine

'No, but we can drive round them It's not a day for climbing mountains It's going to be infernally hot I think I'll make inquiries'

'You're not to ' Katherine cried in alarm, barring his way back into the house 'Aunt Clara won't like it, I know If she had wanted us to drive she would have said so I'm going to walk, anyhow'

'And I'm not I'll drive with our young friend Peter, here' He struck me lightly on the shoulder as he spoke

Katherine still grasped his left arm She began to argue with him, but I thought it wiser to keep out of the discussion I wished he wasn't coming at all Then, just as if he had done all this merely to annoy her, he laughed 'If we *are* going to carry Katherine's lunch,' he said, giving the basket a kick, 'we'd better get a pole and put it through the handle Then two of us might struggle with it together'

It was really not a bad plan, so I fetched a stick from the

hall, and after some further criticisms and objections we set off.

Once we had left Derryaghy behind us, our road lay all the way by the coast. On our right were the mountains ; on our left was a strip of waste land, varying in width, and covered with dry sapless grass upon which a few goats were feeding. Below this were the rocks and the sea. Shadowless in the strong sun, the road wound on ahead, white with dust, like a pale ribbon on the green and russet landscape. We had gone about a mile, I suppose, when Gerald announced : ' This is the end : I'm not going any farther ; it's too hot.'

It brought us once more to a standstill. ' It's so like you to spoil everything ! ' Katherine said in a low voice.

Gerald had perched himself on the rough stone wall, and I knew it would be impossible to budge him. ' What am I spoiling ? ' he asked. ' I suppose we can all please ourselves. Only, since I'm not coming, I'd advise you to chuck my share of the grub away.' He took a cigarette-case from his pocket and offered me a cigarette, which I refused. He lit one himself.

Katherine's colour had heightened, and her blue eyes were remarkably bright. ' You know very well that if you go home now I'll have to go with you,' she told him, ' or at any rate be back for lunch.'

' Why ? ' he asked calmly, and I confess I didn't quite see why myself.

' Because Aunt Clara will expect me. You know that just as well as I do.'

He regarded her with a faint smile.

' We could have stayed out all day,' Katherine went on. ' That's what we said we'd do.'

Gerald had begun to whistle an air very softly, and I recognized it as something he had played last night. His eyes were fixed on the distant horizon, and he seemed slightly bored. I kicked a stone, which at least had the effect of making him glance at me, and then down at the sea. ' Perhaps if we were to bathe it might make a difference,' he at last murmured. ' Who knows? Suppose young Peter and I bathe, while you watch the basket here where it's so nice and sunny. Or you could walk slowly on and I dare say we'd overtake you.'

I turned to Katherine. ' Come along,' I said brusquely. ' What's the use of bothering about him ? '

He looked at me quickly and coloured. 'Then I'm to say you won't be home till dinner-time?' he asked, speaking directly to his sister.

Katherine hesitated. 'Shall he say that?'

'Let him say what he likes,' I returned shortly.

We moved on together, and I did not look back, though Katherine did, more than once. 'I'll make no more arrangements with your brother,' I told her.

She was silent. 'Perhaps we'd better put it off till another day,' she began presently, in a hesitating voice.

'You mean you want to give in to him?' I asked, making up my mind that there would be no other day so far as I was concerned.

Again she was silent, and meanwhile we continued to walk on without slackening our pace. But I could feel that she was uncertain as to what she ought to do; that she did not want to disappoint me—or herself, for that matter—yet on the other hand was unhappy about Gerald. 'He's offended about something,' she began. 'He's very peculiar. You don't understand him. It's not what you think it is.'

She broke off, and I asked without much sympathy: 'What is it, then?'

Katherine did not answer immediately. 'He's taken some idea into his head,' she eventually murmured.

'Idea about what?' I rejoined a little impatiently. 'You're not very explicit.'

'Well—that you don't really want him,' she said.

I frowned. It was the truth of course, but still——

'Why should he think that?' I demanded.

'I don't know . . . You *didn't* talk to him very much. Anyway, it's something of that sort—I'm sure.'

I was on the point of saying that I didn't care what it was, but checked myself. 'He didn't appear to *me* to be offended,' I told her instead. 'Besides, he began to make difficulties before we ever started. It's just that he was too lazy or too hot, and didn't want the fag of carrying the basket.'

'You don't know him, you see,' Katherine replied.

I didn't, but I doubted if she did either; for she seemed to be suggesting that in some queer way he was jealous, which I couldn't believe. And we continued to trudge along, our feet white with dust.

It really *was* very hot ; the sun was blazing, and there were no trees to throw a shadow. I was glad I had so little clothing on—merely flannel trousers, and a light cotton tennis shirt under my jacket—but I wished I had brought a hat.

When we reached a grey stone bridge that spanned a shallow mountain stream we forsook the road and branched inland. This was the Bloody Bridge, I told Katherine, and it had got its name from a religious massacre that had once taken place here. I pointed out the remains of the old church, with its fallen tombs, and after resting for a few minutes we began to climb the valley.

It was wonderfully beautiful, with the dark mountains on both sides of us, and the valley itself widening out gradually, and gradually ascending. The mountains were covered with heather and grass and gorse, while down their slopes ran hidden streams, which flowed into the broader, deeper stream we followed. The colouring was rich and sombre—dull gold and bronze—dark-green, and black—with the brighter purple of heather woven through it ; and the long, narrow, silver streak of water, glistening and gleaming, far far up, till in the end it was lost over the edge of a higher valley which crossed ours at right angles.

‘That’s the Happy Valley,’ I told her.

‘What queer names—the Bloody Bridge, the Happy Valley ! And these are the Mourne Mountains, aren’t they ?’ She paused to gaze up at them. ‘I’ve seen them from the Isle of Man. On a clear day you can see them quite distinctly.’

She began to talk to me about mountains—about Switzerland, where she had been last spring. She was enthusiastic, yet somehow, in spite of her praises, I had an instinct that I should not like Switzerland. After all, I had seen photographs, and I hadn’t liked them. How could she think of Switzerland here ! And the more she dwelt on its beauties the more firmly convinced I became that it must be an odious country. Years later, when confronted with all the bright showiness of the actual scene, I remembered this particular walk, and my own beautiful dark country rose up before me, with its sombre hills, its dreamy, changing sky.

At the time, however, I had nothing to say, no comparisons to make ; I had seen nothing, been nowhere. ‘I would like

to go to a big city like London or Paris,' I told her. 'Not to live there always, but to see it.'

'I don't believe you'd care for it,' she said.

'Why?'

'I don't know. I just think you wouldn't. You're so much part of all this.'

I was surprised. 'What do you mean?' I asked

'I mean that it suits you somehow. And if it does, the other wouldn't.'

I pondered a moment. 'Do *you* like cities?' I asked her.

'Not really; not the way Gerald does. They're all right at times, but I'd rather live in the country.'

'I'd like the picture-galleries,' I declared; and Katherine asked me if I was fond of pictures.

'I've not seen many—only photographs and prints . . . So perhaps I shouldn't say—'

'I'm fond of them too,' Katherine interrupted. 'Not old masters and that sort of thing; but I love the Academy. There was a picture in it this year of a girl skating. She was holding a muff up to her face so that it covered her mouth and chin, yet you could see, all the same, how pretty she was. And the snow was lovely—with a sort of pink light on it—just what you *do* get in Switzerland. If you ever come to London I'll take you round and show you everything.'

But again, just as in the case of the Swiss lakes and mountains, some instinct told me that I should not admire this picture. For a minute or two I had a feeling of depression, and even understood, I thought, what had lain behind Gerald's behaviour last night. 'I don't care for pretty pictures,' I said almost angrily. 'In fact, I hate everything pretty.'

'Would you rather have ugly ones?' Katherine laughed, as if she had caught me in an absurdity.

I had no answer. I began to feel lonely and disappointed. Something had arisen between us—a kind of cloudy barrier chilling and dull. Then I looked at her and the feeling passed. It was idiotic to allow such things to matter.

She was very attractive, though in quite a different way from her brother. All at once I knew where I had seen her before—her eyes, at least. They were the eyes of Prudence Carroll.

I gazed at her, seeking some further resemblance, but could discover none. Her skin was very white, except where in her cheeks it flushed to a soft glow. Her brown crisp hair was pulled back straight from her forehead, though one or two little tufts had got loose. Her nose and mouth had not the delicacy of Gerald's, and her expression was utterly different from his ; but it was her expression that so attracted me. Prudence Carroll had the same expression—so there *was* another resemblance. The same eyes—the same expression. Perhaps, then, the same spirit. A sort of daydream had begun to weave itself into my thoughts.

'How far can we get this way?' Katherine interrupted me.

'As far as you can see. We could go along the Happy Valley and home over Slieve Donard ; but it's a fairly long tramp.'

We climbed slowly, not talking very much. It was past noon and hotter than ever, and when we reached a deep green pool under a waterfall we stopped to drink and to bathe our hands and faces in it. Its cold sweetness was alluring : the white spray foamed and broke and sparkled in the sun. 'It would be a good place for a bathe,' I said.

I had no intention of bathing, but : 'Bathe if you want to,' Katherine told me. 'I'll walk on and sit down somewhere and wait for you.'

If it hadn't been so like Gerald's suggestion I might have been tempted. As it was, I shook my head. 'We could have lunch here, though,' I suggested. 'Then, if we're coming back this way, we could hide the basket somewhere, and not be bothered by it till we're going home.'

We spread a napkin on a broad flat stone, and our lunch on top of that. I now discovered why the basket had been so heavy ; Katherine seemed to have provided food for several meals. We had almost finished when a peculiar feeling rather than a sound made me look up, and I saw a man standing not more than three or four yards from us. He gave me a start, for it was as if he had arisen straight out of the earth. Katherine looked up too, fixing her eyes steadily upon him. She did not speak : neither of us spoke. The man too was silent.

He was large and pale, with short brown hair ; and at the back of his head he wore a boy's cap that was too small for him and somehow lent something abnormal to his appearance. His

clothes, without being ragged, were stained and worn. He was youngish—probably about thirty—and strongly built. I didn't like him at all. There was a cold malevolence in the pale clean-shaven face—a conscious cruelty—which seemed to stare out of the hard light-brown eyes and to hover about the smiling lips. He stood before us, looking down in obvious enjoyment of our discomfiture, making no movement to pass on. It was curious that features perfectly regular, features neither coarse nor bloated, could give so vivid an impression of unpleasantness. But they did—and that prolonged impudent stare, passing slowly over me, seemed to leave a slime behind it.

His eyes slid from me to Katherine, in the same gloating and repulsive scrutiny. What was he doing here? He was no countryman: of that I was sure. Then, as my first startled feeling passed, my temper began to rise. 'What do you want?' I asked him gruffly. 'How much longer are you going to stand there?'

He laughed—almost noiselessly—though he still neither moved nor spoke. But the realization that he deliberately meant to annoy us released something within me and, seizing a sharp biggish stone, I jumped to my feet. I felt a sudden rage, an extraordinary desire to destroy. I could actually feel my lips drawing back ever so little from my teeth, like the lips of an angry terrier. I had no longer the least sense of fear: on the contrary, what I wanted now was for him to make a movement forward—any gesture that I could construe as threatening. The rough natural weapon I had picked up must have impressed him, for he drew back and his face altered. Then he laughed aloud, but on a forced and quite different note, and turned on his heel. I had an absurd feeling of elation—an impulse, like that of a young cockerel, to flap my wings and crow. Somehow I was certain my stone would not have missed its mark, and that there would have been no hesitation. We watched him as he retreated, now disappearing from sight, and now reappearing, but always at a point farther down. I wondered what would have happened if I had been timid. That, I supposed, was what he had hoped. He would have remained with us, have followed us.

'Well, he's gone,' I said. 'He was a horrible person.' And I turned to Katherine.

‘Do you know what *you* looked like?’ she asked me. And before I could answer: ‘You looked just like David.’

I blushed. Secretly I was extremely flattered, but to cover my bashfulness answered ungraciously that I had never cared much for David.

‘Neither did I till a minute ago,’ Katherine said; ‘but that was because I didn’t know what he was like.’

The two speeches, though logically contradictory, left no doubt as to her meaning, and I blushed more deeply. ‘Well, the beast’s gone at any rate,’ I mumbled. ‘I must tell Michael when we get home. He can’t be prowling about here for any good.’

‘Who is Michael?’ Katherine inquired.

‘One of our policemen—the decentest.’

We hid the basket under the heather, and for a long time we sat there, while a stillness gradually fell upon us, through which the noise of splashing water seemed to weave itself into patterns and arabesques of sound.

‘Shall we go up higher?’ I asked at last, and without answering me Katherine rose and began to climb the hillside. I followed, over dry springy fragrant heather, and between huge grey mossy boulders that had lain undisturbed for centuries. We stopped to look at a fly-catching plant, that curious intermediate type between animal and vegetable. Katherine had never seen one before, and she examined the outspread concave disc, with the skeletons, the grey husks of flies, adhering to its green hairy surface. We found a bee struggling on his back on the purple flower of a thistle, waving his legs in the air, a ridiculous picture of intoxication. But in spite of these and similar interruptions the silence that had stolen upon us lingered still.

When we reached a place where the ground rose steeply for a few yards I gave Katherine my hand to help her, and when we came to more level ground we still went on hand in hand. And with this light contact there came to me a strange pleasure, dreamy yet thrilling, unlike anything I had known before. I did not look at Katherine. When I spoke, telling her to avoid a patch of marshy ground that here and there spread across the path, the sound of my voice astonished me, so unfamiliar was it—

even trembling slightly : and I felt my limbs trembling too. Why should it be so ? What was there to give me this strange sense of eagerness and excitement and happiness ? It was a quite new emotion. Yet nothing had happened except this short easy climb together, hand in hand. I flung myself down at last among the heather, lying with my hands clasped behind my head and my face turned up to the cloudless sky. Far, far below us the sea—blue and broad and still—lay shimmering in the hot sun. I had a feeling of intense enjoyment, physical and mental—a kind of saturation in the beauty that lay all around us—while another happiness rose through and mingled with this. It was an emotion so strong, so urgent, that I felt it must be visible, and I turned my head away so that Katherine should not see my face.

Presently I looked round at her. She was seated beside me, gazing straight out at the distant sea. The wide brim of her hat shadowed her face. The deep blue of her eyes was darker than the sea, darker than the sky, darker even than the blue of a cornflower. I wanted to say something. I wanted her to feel what I felt. Perhaps she did feel it—only how could I know ? I hovered on the verge of speech, like a timid bather on the brink of a pool ; but there was no one to give me a friendly push, and the plunge was not taken.

‘ It’s nice here—don’t you think ? ’ I managed to bring out ; and those feeble words were all I could find to express the uprush of emotion that had shaken my whole being.

For what I imagined to be new was really old—old as life itself. I did not realize it, but the vast and complex forces of nature were stirring within me very much as the new leaf germinates in the growing plant, and perhaps as unconsciously. Yet there was something which, without any words at all, I must have expressed. I mean the helplessness of youth, its pathetic credulity and good faith, its brightness and briefness in the face of those hoary old mountains, and of feelings even more ancient.

With an effort I tried to break through what seemed a kind of sorcery. I *could* break through it, and the obvious way was to begin talking about ordinary commonplace things. I sat up and clasped my hands round my knees. ‘ I wonder what it will be like living in town ? ’ I said.

Katherine was struggling with a tough branch of heather, and I offered her my knife. 'You're going away after the summer, aren't you?' she answered. 'Aunt Clara told me you were.'

I nodded. 'My father wanted me to try for a post in a government office—the kind of job I'd hate. You're what's called a boy clerk, and have to sit all day long at a desk.' Then I added in a sudden burst of confidence: 'Mrs. Carroll is paying for me, and will be afterwards, when I go to Oxford. She wants me to go either to Oxford or Cambridge, and of course my father can't afford to send me. For that matter, he'd rather I didn't go at all. I don't believe he'd allow me to go except for one thing. Mrs. Carroll doesn't know about it, but it's really that, and not her persuasions, that made him give in.'

'What?' Katherine asked curiously.

'My mother once sent money to be used for my education, and he wouldn't take it.'

'Your mother!' Katherine repeated; and it dawned on me that perhaps I oughtn't to have spoken. Somehow I had taken it for granted that she would know about my mother, but evidently she didn't.

'She doesn't live at home,' I explained quickly; and then to change the subject, took the piece of paper Willie Breen had given me that morning from my pocket. 'Can you guess what this is?' I asked.

She turned it over rather absently and shook her head. I could see that she was still thinking about my mother.

'It means that on Friday there will be a meeting of a kind of club we have—a night club. The whole thing's a secret—a secret society. We sit round a fire, and have supper, and talk and tell yarns—and that's all.'

But Katherine continued to look preoccupied, and I knew she would have liked to question me, though not about our club. 'Why is it secret?' she asked, without much interest.

'Oh, I don't know. At least I do. It's the secrecy that's the attraction. The meetings are usually either on the golf-links, or somewhere along the rocks near where Gerald wanted to bathe. Pretty late. About half-past eleven or twelve. It's just a sort of game really—like Red Indians. I got it up last year with some boys who were staying down here. And then,

afterwards, I kept it up with a few of the village boys. This year I got sick of it, and I've only been to one meeting.'

'At night!' Katherine reflected. 'That must be rather queer. I love the sea at night . . . Are you allowed to bring visitors?'

'There's no rule about it,' I answered, a little surprised. 'Nobody ever *has* brought a visitor. But why do you ask? Would you like to come?'

She glanced at me, and then laughed. 'Yes,' she said simply. 'Would it matter?'

I turned it over, wondering if it would. 'There'll be nobody there but boys,' I warned her, '—village boys.'

'But *you'd* take me; and of course Gerald would come.'

'I'll take you if you'll come by yourself,' I said.

Katherine shook her head. 'I couldn't. Besides, it would be rather mean. What harm could Gerald do?'

I didn't say; but without him I felt I could carry the thing off; with him I knew it would be difficult. 'You'd have to promise not to tell anybody,' I went on.

'Of course. Why should I tell? For one thing, Aunt Clara wouldn't allow me to go if I did.'

'But I mean afterwards.'

'You needn't be alarmed: I'll not tell.'

For a minute or two I looked down the sunlit hillside: then I made up my mind to take the risk. 'If you can promise that Gerald won't talk about it I'll take you . . .'

'Only how will you manage it?' I added immediately. 'Won't you find it hard to get out?'

'No: we'll simply sit up later than the others. They go to bed soon after ten.'

I knew they did; but even so, it mightn't be as easy as she imagined. 'The lodge gate will be locked,' I reminded her.

'We can get over the wall,' she replied. 'You must think me a very helpless kind of creature.'

I didn't: I was really thinking not of gates or walls but of Gerald—of how he'd go down with the other boys. It might be all right, but I doubted it. Especially as there'd be at least half a dozen of them to back each other up. At this stage, however, I couldn't very well begin to raise objections. 'I'll give you the particulars on Friday morning,' I said.

'Perhaps Gerald won't want to come. I shouldn't think it would be much in his line.'

'How do you get out yourself?' Katherine questioned me.

'By the parlour window. Otherwise I'd have to leave the door open. You see there's the getting-back to be considered. Besides, the window makes no noise.'

She had taken off her hat and it lay on the ground beside her; she was fastening the bunch of heather she had gathered into her white muslin dress. As I watched her I couldn't understand why I had been so shy and awkward last night. Now everything was as easy as if we had been friends for months. Of course, last night she hadn't talked a great deal herself. For that matter she didn't seem to be a very talkative person; she had done more listening than talking to-day. 'Have you looked at the pictures yet?' I suddenly asked her. 'I mean the ones hanging in the corridor upstairs—the portraits.'

Katherine completed her task before answering. 'Not very particularly. Why? Are they supposed to be anything special?'

'Well, one is; but that's not the one I mean. There's a picture that reminds me of you: a portrait of Prudence Carroll. She's standing beside a spinet.'

'I'm afraid I've never even heard of her,' Katherine said. 'I'm shockingly ignorant of my ancestors.'

'She wasn't an ancestor exactly. Only a relation. She was never married. And the likeness isn't physical.'

Katherine laughed. 'Oh!...As mysterious as that! I don't fancy I'll see it then.'

'I saw it,' I rejoined, gazing at her. 'But it *is* rather mysterious. I mean, I can see it more clearly at some times than at others. I don't think it would be there if you were asleep or dead.'

'What a horrid idea!' Katherine exclaimed; and she really looked as if I had said something unpleasant.

I tried to explain what I meant. 'It's not horrid,' I told her. 'And I suppose we *are* more or less made up of other people, if it comes to that. Especially where there's no break—where it goes on continuously—the same life. I mean I *must* be a kind of continuation of my father's life—just as he is of *his* father's. It couldn't be anything else; because, after all, I'm a part of him.'

And as it goes farther back it must take in outlying lives on both sides—and perhaps thoughts and memories

‘I expect I’m not putting it very clearly,’ I went on, since she made no answer. ‘But I can imagine a person coming to a house like Derryaghy, knowing he had never been there before, yet finding that he remembered this room and that—where this passage led to, and what view he would see when he looked out through the window at the top of the stairs. Or it might be that two people would come there together, and everything they said would sound to them like an echo. Each would know what the other was going to say before he had said it.’

It was the sort of idea that particularly appealed to me, but evidently not at all to Katherine. ‘You’re rather morbid, aren’t you?’ she murmured, with a little grimace. ‘And I know what you’re trying to persuade yourself that I’m this Carroll person come to life again. But I’m not, and I don’t want to be. You’re certainly the queerest boy I’ve ever met.’

‘You told me I was like David,’ I said.

‘So you are,’ she laughed, ‘but I never met David. I believe you wish I was a ghost. How anybody can have such thoughts on a day like this and in a place like this—’ Well, here’s your penknife, you’ll lose it.’

I put it back into my pocket in silence.

‘Now you’re cross, I suppose,’ Katherine said, ‘and I don’t see that you’ve any right to be.’

‘I’m not cross,’ I answered, ‘but you’re quite wrong to think I’d rather have you if you were a ghost.’

She laughed again. ‘I didn’t mean it. Don’t be so silly and don’t look so sulky. You *are* sulky, you know, and it comes and goes at the least thing. You were a *ful* last night at dinner.’

‘I couldn’t help it. Besides, it wasn’t really that.’

‘The strange thing is,’ she went on reflectively with her head a little on one side, ‘that it makes you look rather nice. I can’t understand *why* it should, because it oughtn’t to—naturally—for you can’t be feeling nice. All the same it does—at least to me. You see, Peter, I think we’re going to be friends.’

‘So do I.’

‘But if we are, it won’t be because we’re like each other. We’re not.’

‘Perhaps,’ I muttered.

'There's no 'perhaps' about it ; and you'd better make up your mind to that. Otherwise everything will go wrong . . . And now I'm sure we ought at least to begin *thinking* of going home.'

'Not yet,' I said. 'There's tons of time.'

'How much ?' Katherine asked. 'Remember we've got to get back to the basket, and then have tea.'

Chapter 10

I STAYED in the house all evening, but I could not read, and so I sat down to write to Katherine. I wrote for more than an hour, though I was very doubtful whether in the end I should post my letter. It was the first time I had ever written to anybody. Of course I cannot remember now what I said : I can remember the sense of it, or perhaps the nonsense, but not how I expressed it. Very badly, I suppose, for I tore my first attempt up and began another, over which I must have spent an even longer time, since to finish it I was obliged to light the lamp. When I went out to the post office it was quite dark, and immediately after I had dropped my letter in the box I had a strong desire to get it back again. Why had I been in such a hurry ? I ought to have kept it till the morning. But I was always in a hurry to do things. Then, as I pictured Katherine reading it, a thrill of excitement swept through my timidity, and I was glad.

I did not go home, but strolled instead over the golf-links in the direction of the sea. At such an hour the links were absolutely deserted (for pedestrians, and even lovers, kept to the roads and lanes) ; and the pale sandhills, stretching away in the moonlight beside a dark waste of water, wore an unfamiliar, a slightly weird aspect, suggestive of some desolate lunar landscape. I wandered on, utterly forgetful of time, till I found a comfortable spot where the ground sloped gently down to the shore. I was filled with a passionate sense of life, and, stretching myself on the soft white powdery sand, I looked out over the sea.

The water was a dark mass under the moon—darker than the beach, darker than the sky, but not so dark as the mountains

behind me. There was no wind. There was no sound except the noise of the waves rolling in and breaking on the flat strand, that stretched on round to Dundrum Bay, three miles off. Moths hovered above me, but nothing else stirred. I looked up into the wide black vault of the sky, in which the shining moon floated, bright and serene. And I lay there in luxurious enjoyment of the night, and of the life that was like a deep buoyant spring mounting up through my body. It seemed to me that my spirit was no longer merely passive and receptive, but that it had taken wing, had grown lighter and more volatile, was diffused through the surrounding air—through the sky and the sea—was moving with the movement of the water. The earth beneath me was living and breathing; and, obedient to some obscure physical prompting, I turned round and pressed my mouth against the thin dry grass, closer and closer, in a long, silent embrace.

It was just as well, perhaps, that there was no one to observe this exhibition of primitive and eternal instinct. I felt a passionate happiness and excitement. My head was hot; the salt sharp smell of the sea seemed to have set all my nerves thrilling and tingling; and I unfastened my shirt that my flesh might be naked. The past had slipped from me, and I lived in this moment, squeezing out its ecstasy to the last drop, as I might the juice of some ripe fruit. It seemed to me that I was on the brink of finding something for which all my previous existence had been but one long preparation and search: I was fumbling at the door of an enchanted garden: in a moment it would swing open: already the perfume of unknown flowers and fruits was in my nostrils. My emotion was deep and continuous. In my mind I went over the story of Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*. I thought of the shepherd-boy Endymion: I imagined myself Endymion, as I lay there half naked in the moonlight. My eyes dimmed and the blood raced through my veins: it was as if the heart of the summer night had suddenly opened out, like a dark gigantic rose, and brought me a strange rapture.

When I awakened to more commonplace things I knew that it must be very late indeed. I wondered what had possessed me and what story I could tell my father, who would be standing

in the hall, holding up a candle, while he looked sternly at me before he turned round to fasten the chain of the door. I ran home to the exact fulfilment of this vision, but it was already past midnight, and my father would not listen to my excuses. He was very angry indeed, though his anger could not come between me and my happiness. I listened to him in a kind of dream, and as soon as a pause came, slipped away from him and on upstairs. In the dark, as I undressed, the delicate scent of heather was still clinging to my clothes, filling the small bedroom and bringing the whole day back to me from the beginning. Safe between the cool sheets, I went over each incident of it ; while the scent of heather floated about me. And now I had acquired a marvellous boldness ; I gave utterance to every thought that arose in my mind ; the embrace that had been so impossible was quite easy. One by one, delightful pictures drifted in through the windows of my imagination ; one by one they opened out before me. and in the midst of them I fell asleep.

But my sleep was only a completer realization of my waking thoughts. I was again with Katherine, and again we were alone on the mountain-side. We were coming home, and I was a little behind her, when she stopped to gather a handful of heather. But instead of fastening it into her dress she turned and flung it at me, and then ran on down the hill. I followed quickly, and all at once she stopped running, and we stood there, hot and panting and laughing. Then impulsively she lifted her face, and I kissed her. I held her close to me and kissed her again and again. And the scent of heather floated about my bed, the fragrance of reality mingling with the fragrance of dreamland.

Chapter 11

NEXT morning I should probably have rushed off to Derryaghy immediately after breakfast, but my father kept me working in the garden, where he was erecting a wooden trellis over the gate. So we sawed our wood and hammered in our nails, and all the time my mind was busy with the letter I had written to Katherine, and with guesses as to what she would think of it.

I kept on changing my opinion. I was afraid that it might have exactly the opposite effect from the one I had intended, yet every now and then, in spite of this, I felt glad that I had sent it ; for if it *didn't* displease her, then I should be very happy and even if it did, at least I should understand better where I stood and what I might hope for.

After dinner I was free, but we dined at two, while lunch at Derryaghy was at one, and very foolishly I had made no appointment. I hurried along the road, which meant that I constantly had to stop to wait for Remus, who had come out for an ordinary walk, and was pursuing it in what seemed to him an ordinary fashion. If I ran on it made no difference. He had complete confidence in me : we had come out together, therefore presently I would run back again. Meanwhile he jogged along at his customary pace, disregarding youthful impetuosity.

As a sort of propitiation to fortune, I told myself that the Dales wouldn't be there—that they would take it for granted, when I had made no arrangement, that I wasn't coming. All the same, I didn't really believe this, and experienced a sharp pang of disappointment when on reaching the house I found it to be the case. Miss Katherine and Master Gerald had gone out riding : Mrs. Carroll and Miss Dick also had gone out : nobody was expected home before tea-time at earliest, and no message had been left for me.

I tried not to look as taken aback as I felt. But I was taken aback. I thought it strange ; I thought they might at any rate have left word whether they were going to be out for the whole afternoon or not, I left word myself, to say that I would call again in the evening after dinner, and went on upstairs to my room.

I brought Remus with me, although he showed an inclination to visit the kitchen quarters, and we stood together at the window looking out into the garden. I felt discouraged and more than a little hurt. It seemed to me that Katherine might at least have scribbled a note, however brief. She must have got my letter that morning, and she must have known, from its nature, that I should like a reply. Surely it didn't require much imagination or sympathy to guess that . . .

She just hadn't bothered—or else she hadn't *felt* any sympathy. And why couldn't she have gone out riding in the morning

instead of the afternoon ? It was far more likely that I would come in the afternoon. Evidently it hadn't mattered to her when I came, or if I never came.

But these thoughts were rapidly making me so unhappy that I checked them. I knew perfectly well that they were mere suppositions prompted by disappointment, that it was quite likely that she *had* expected me in the morning, and that a letter might at this very moment be on its way to me. By no possibility could I have received one before I had set out even if she had posted it direct^y after breakfast. I grew more cheerful, yet still I lingered at the window.

What should I do ? Rerius had already solved *his* problem by going to sleep. I might get a book and sit in the garden, then I should be there to receive the wanderers at whatever hour they returned.

I had left the door open, for though I didn't quite know why I had come upstairs, it had certainly not been with the intention of remaining there. How still the house always was when I got it to myself ! Our house at home was never like this, but then a small house could not be. It was the empty rooms, the empty passages—or my sense of these things. I felt an old mood stealing back into my mind. It always would come back, I supposed, no matter how ardently other moods might flame up in between.

I went out into the long wide corridor and stood there in a reverie. Here were the portraits, and every portrait was dreaming. I myself was dreaming, and this floating impalpable dream life was a kind of quivering, delicate medium, whispering and vibrating in tune with my imagination. I was not alone, not unnoticed, not a stranger. The others were aware of me. Here was a boy with whom they could get into touch. Might not some overt sign of recognition be given to him ? I was ready to receive it. I waited for it deliberately—pausing and looking up expectantly. Perhaps if I were really to love that gentle Prudence Carroll, to kiss her painted lips, the sign would be given. But would she be jealous when I left her ?—for after all I could only love her in a dream. Through the tall landing windows a golden stream of sunlight, filled with floating specks of dust, swam down the shadowed passage and touched the flowers in her hand. But my ghosts had never shunned the

sunlight : they were friendly ghosts, and not afraid to walk in the garden, or to pass me on the stairs or in the hall, in broad daylight. Often I had felt them to be there, and some day perhaps I should see them. With this thought there came to me a desire to revisit their own garden—a walled place of dark-green graves and shady paths. What, I wondered, would Katherine have said to that ?

But I didn't care what she would say : I was quite happy again. I called to the slumbering Remus and we ran down the stairs and out of the house and grounds. We took a short-cut across the fields, and down a narrow mossy lane, purple with foxgloves, and sleepy with bees. It brought us out immediately opposite the ancient church, where service was still held, and where now, as we came up, I saw that the door was open.

I went inside, and an old woman, who was sweeping with a long-handled broom, wished me good-day. I talked to her for a few minutes and then began to wander idly about, trying my Latin on the inscriptions, peeping behind doors and through windows. A church on a weekday is quite another place from church on Sundays, I decided, and far pleasanter. This particular church too—so different from the one I attended with my father—had a kind of homely charm and attractiveness. I climbed into the pulpit and imagined myself preaching, while Remus, and the old woman, Margaret Beattie, watched me.

Margaret stopped sweeping to do so, and leaned on the handle of her broom. " You're the very spit of a fine curate, Master Peter," she declared, in a thin cracked voice, evidently perceiving in my antics the betrayal of a vocation.

' I know I am, Margaret,' I told her, ' but they won't get me all the same.'

' What's more, I believe you're an old witch,' I continued, for she was deaf as a post, and couldn't hear a word unless you shouted in her ear. ' That's the very broomstick you ride on to the sabbath, I expect ; and you'll fly away on it as soon as you've finished whatever mischief you're doing here.'

She chuckled in the way deaf people do, and remarked that she'd always known I'd be a parson.

But presently I left her, and went out into the sunshine to potter among the graves. All were old, for few people were

buried here now—though Mr. Carroll had been. Most of the headstones were stained green with age and weather, and the lettering was so worn that it was often necessary to peer close in order to decipher a name or a date. I lingered in the corner where lay the bones of the Carrolls, and thought of the pictures I had been looking at a little earlier.

Margaret came out at last, locking the door behind her. I heard her shambling feet on the gravel, followed by the clanging of the iron gate that left me and Remus to ourselves. Had my ghosts preceded us hither? I wondered; or did they still linger in the upper rooms at Derryaghy? Threading my way to the low sun-warmed wall, I sat down on it, turning my back to the church. Margaret had already disappeared, and before me lay a broad open country, rich and dark in the late afternoon light. The gleam of water, of shallow pool and stream, shone palely amid long grass and darker whin bushes; while beyond were trees, looking nearly black against the western sky. The few clouds hardly drifted in the still air, and the hills stood out boldly against a deep background of luminous sky. Everything in this hollow-lying tract shimmered and floated in a kind of soft romantic richness, dreamy as a Perugino landscape; and over all was a great sea of light and sky—grey, faint-green, and warmer yellow—with clear silver where the water lay.

After a while I turned and faced the churchyard. It was very peaceful and still; with nothing in the least melancholy in its solitude. To me, indeed, it had a kind of happy beauty which I loved. 'There never is anything sad about old country churchyards,' I told myself, 'and that must be a sign that all is well with their inhabitants.'

'What is death?' I went on, addressing Remus, who liked to be talked to, and didn't much mind what you talked about. 'I don't believe anybody knows. I don't believe there's really any such thing. At least, I believe it's only a change, and may be—in fact it must be—frightfully exciting.' A large gorgeous butterfly, a red admiral, flitted over the wall and alighted on one of the gravestones, spreading flat his black and crimson wings against it. He remained there with the stillness of a painted thing, drinking in the heat, knowing, perhaps nothing except that,

The afternoon was waning. The sun had crept down the

sky, and deep blue shadows blurred the tangled grass. Then suddenly, washed up out of the depth of time, came one of those strange, inexplicable silences ; and I held my breath to listen. What where they—these pauses in life, in everything—these feelings of suspense, of expectation ? An ineffable peacefulness descended upon me. A delicate spirit of beauty was wandering through the unmown grass, under the broad-leaved trees, beside the grey old church. Surely there must be something of which all this was merely the reflection ! I could feel it ; I knew it. But what did it mean ? What was I waiting for ? What was it I desired ? What kingdom in eternity ?

I thought of my soul as a little candle-flame, hovering at my lips, ready to take to flight. If I blew it from me it might flicker away over the grass, down into the graves, up into the air a tiny tongue of flame, no bigger than a piece of thistle-down. I thought of the old, silent, listening house—mysterious and haunted—with its closed doors and brown portraits—a dream-thing that too—and all the ghosts who lived there . . .

Chapter 12

IN the evening my father again wanted me to help him, and it was after nine before I was able to make my escape. Then I set out for Derryaghy. At the corner of the Bryansford Road, however, I met Willie Breen, and stopped to get particulars about the club meeting on Friday night. I did not mention the Dales, because I was almost sure that in the end Katherine would not come, and in the midst of our talk Willie broke off abruptly with : ‘ Here’s your fine friends.’ At the same time he stuck his hands in his pockets and strolled on whistling.

I wheeled round to face Miss Dick, Katherine, and Gerald, all coming towards me.

‘ We’re not going for a walk : at least we’re only going as far as the station to collect a parcel,’ cried Katherine, anticipating my indignant surmise. ‘ We thought we’d meet you.’

‘ I’m sorry I’m so late,’ I apologized. ‘ I couldn’t help it.’

I dropped with her behind the others, and deliberately slackened my pace.

When they were out of earshot Katherine said : ' I got your letter. It was very nice, but I hope you didn't expect an answer. I hate writing letters, and I knew I'd be seeing you.'

This extremely matter-of-fact tone was the only one I hadn't reckoned with, and somehow it let me down with a bump. ' You weren't angry ? ' I asked, feeling that I would almost rather she had been.

' No. Why should I be angry ? Of course I couldn't make out what you meant exactly. It was a kind of poem, wasn't it—and not intended to be taken too literally ? ' Abruptly she changed the subject. What have you been doing with yourself all day ? '

' In the morning I helped my father to put up a trellis in the garden : in the afternoon I called for you, and then went on to the old parish church : in the evening I helped my father again : and now I'm here . . . Don't let's go to the station,' I added, coming to a halt. ' Does it matter ? You said they were only going there and back ; and I can take you home a different way. It's a little longer, but—— Do you mind ? '

Gerald looked round at that moment, and Katherine called out : ' We're not coming,' Then, as Miss Dick looked round also and they both stopped, she waved them on. ' We're going home by another way. Peter wants to show me a church.'

Miss Dick answered something which I failed to catch ; but they moved on without us.

' And now,' said Katherine, ' you'll *have* to show me the church, and I hope it isn't miles away, for I musn't be late,'

' It's quite close,' I said, ' if we take a short-cut across the fields.'

We turned back, and then turned inland ; and after we had gone a short distance, Katherine unexpectedly asked me : ' What *did* you mean by your letter, Peter ? '

' I don't know,' I said. ' Burn it . . . I meant everything that's in it . . . '

Katherine walked on in silence. She did not seem in a hurry after all, for presently she stopped and looked across the fields. ' Why do you want me to burn it ? ' she asked.

' I don't really. At least, not if you care to keep it. I wanted to tell you what I did tell you, but now I've done so—that's all that matters.'

It wasn't all that mattered, but I felt it was enough for the time being, though after a little I said : ' I'd like to make a drawing of you.'

' A drawing ?'

' Yes : a portrait.' We had begun to move on again—slowly—through the deepening twilight. ' I thought of it when I was telling you about the other portrait—Prudence Carroll's.'

' But—— I didn't even know you *could* draw.'

' I can't,' I answered ; ' at least, not well. I've never had lessons. It's merely that I'd like to try this—some day.'

' Still,' Katherine deliberated, ' you wouldn't have suggested it unless you'd tried before.'

' Oh yes ; I'm always trying. What I mean to say is that they're only experiments—you needn't expect anything good . . . I've tried painting, too.'

' Real painting ? Pictures ?'

I laughed. ' No ; only sketches . . . They're more like notes,' I explained, for I knew she wouldn't think them pictures : ' done to remind me of things. Sometimes I can get something—and much oftener I can't. But I like trying.'

Katherine appeared to be impressed, which wasn't what I wanted. ' Will you show them to me ?' she asked.

I wasn't eager to do this either. ' You won't see anything in them,' I replied evasively. ' They're only meant for myself. There's one at Derryaghy, in Mrs. Carroll's bedroom—I'll show you that . . . And now, if we're going to the churchyard, we'd better cross the fields.'

' She looked at me dubiously. ' Oh !' she murmured. ' You didn't tell me it was a churchyard.'

' What did I tell you ?' I asked, in surprise.

' You told me it was a church. However——'

' Well, so it is,' I answered. ' I expect you'll be going there on Sunday.'

She said nothing further, and I helped her across the stile. Or rather I tried to help her, for she rejected the hand I offered. ' If you'll only get out of the way,' she laughed, ' I can manage by myself.' And I drew back at once.

I felt a little hurt, nevertheless. Why wouldn't she allow me to help her ? Of course, it wasn't necessary, as she quickly proved ; but then it hadn't been necessary yesterday to walk

hand in hand It was as if she wished me to realize that yesterday was not to-day

Beyond the shadow of the tall hedge the grassy country looked grey and insubstantial under the rising moon The dark spire and the few trees we were aiming for were visible now, and I pointed them out, and in a little while we reached the low wall on which I had sat that afternoon Only at this hour, and flooded with fantastic moonlight, the place itself seemed quite different Its friendly, homely quality had vanished It was colder, more remote, less welcoming—with something slightly equivocal in its beauty

'You don't want to go inside, I suppose?' Katherine said dissuasively, and I guessed from the sound of her voice that she herself didn't want to be here at all

'Its not like a modern churchyard,' I tried to reassure her 'There's nothing unpleasant—no bodies—nothing except a little dust, and a few ghosts perhaps' Then I stopped, for I doubted if I were improving matters

She shrugged her shoulders, and we stood in silence beside the wall

Down by the grave just beneath us something was moving through the long grass, but I did not point this out to Katherine, though very likely it was only a rabbit A fairy tale of Hans Andersen's came into my mind, and I saw Death, like an old gardener, floating over the wall, carrying a soul, like a baby, folded in his arms and I watched him lay it to sleep under the trees I had forgotten all the details of the story, but I made a story for myself and the moonlight on the grass and on the weather-worn gravestones, the black lurking shadows and the lonely moon-drenched church, wove into it a mysterious loneliness It seemed to me that something might very easily happen now that would bring a stranger, vaster world directly into relation with us In that other world, I thought, they perhaps dreamed of this, just as we sometimes did of it, and one was no more unreal than the other

Presently Katherine touched my arm 'We ought to be going, Peter,' she said 'You'd rather stay, I expect, but you know how early they go to bed, and it must be getting late

'All right,' I answered, taking a last look before we turned away,

'Do you like me, Katherine?' I asked, less out of any

feeling of sentimentality than because I really wished to know. I tried to explain what I meant 'You told me yesterday I was morbid ; and I don't think we always care for the same things. I like all this, for instance ; I like it very much ; but I don't feel that you do And——'

'And what ?' she asked, without looking at me

'Well, you see,' I blundered : 'you're seventeen, which means that you're grown up, and——'

'And what ?' she asked again

'Perhaps I only bore you'

'You haven't up to the present,' she said quietly. 'Is that all ?'

'Yes,' I replied, but it wasn't, and I couldn't help adding : 'Girls do like people older than themselves, don't they ? I mean, in novels they usually——'

I got no further, for Katherine had begun to laugh. I felt myself colouring, and walked on in silence

'I'm sorry, Peter I didn't mean to laugh, but I couldn't help it It's only that—it sounded so funny and—I don't want you to be middle-aged. I'd much rather have you as you are I think you're very nice as you are, and in your own way which is a little odd of course ; though I certainly don't wish to change it And that's all I really meant yesterday, no matter what I may have said'

Chapter 13

It was late, and the house was quiet When I leaned out of my window I could hear the sound of the waves, but no other sound ; then I opened my bedroom door softly and crept out into the passage From my father's room there came a heavy muffled snoring as I made my way downstairs I put on my shoes in the parlour, unsnibbed the window, and clambered across the sill into the garden

The night was clear and full of moonlight, and my black shadow glided before me on the white bare road Not a soul was abroad, and as I walked on I had a sense of freedom and exhilaration. I felt pretty sure that Katherine and Gerald would not come, but contrary to both my expectation and desire

they were waiting for me near the lodge gate, in the shadow of a hawthorn hedge, and Katherine held a parcel in her hand.

We did not talk very much as we went quickly on, following the road we had taken on the morning of our picnic. I kept a sharp look-out, but I could see no sign of any other boys. However, the meeting had been arranged for midnight, and it was past that now. Below us, on our left, the sea murmured and splashed through the warm summer night; on our right the chain of mountains rose, black against the sky.

'We're late,' I said; and then added: 'You'll have to take an oath of secrecy.'

I had already told them this at least half a dozen times, but I was a little nervous, for I had no idea what kind of reception we were going to get, and as a precaution had recommended Katherine to bring some provisions. Everybody, of course, brought his own supper, but a few extras, I hoped, might create a good impression. Yet I was sorry now that I hadn't said something beforehand to the other boys. It would have been much wiser, I felt, for really I was springing the thing on them; and I had a strong suspicion that whether the plan worked or not it wasn't likely to make me popular.

We had walked for about a quarter of an hour, and had left the village well behind us, when down towards Maggie's Leap I saw the red glow of the bonfire. We turned towards it, clambering over the rough ground, till presently, in a hollow, we saw them—seven or eight boys—sitting round a fire. Thirty feet below us the sea looked black and strange; and the mysterious night floated about us, tranquil and benign.

There was an awkward moment when we advanced into the firelight, and before I introduced the visitors. Everybody stared, but no room was made for us near the fire, and a profound silence followed my very lame speech, in the chill of which Gerald lit a cigarette, and we took our seats, slightly beyond the main circle. When Katherine produced her contributions to the supper I feared at first they were going to be refused; nor was anything said about the vow of secrecy; nothing was said at all. Only Sam Geoghegan, a boy I had never liked, but who was the biggest boy there, began whispering to his right-hand neighbour, and I could guess from what I knew of him the nature of his remarks.

Still, we were not told to go away ; the food was accepted ; and as supper progressed the atmosphere thawed a little. I began to hope that the worst was over. It chiefly depended on Sam, I knew. He was the only disagreeable person present, and as yet he had given no positive sign either of hostility or the reverse.

Willie Breen, who had been fumbling in his pocket, now produced a small bottle filled with some bright red liquid, which he held up to the light, gazing at it earnestly. Then, when everyone's attention was fixed on him, his face stiffened into an expression of suppressed agony and, drawing his hand across his forehead, he gasped for breath.

'What's the matter, Billy ? Stomach bad ?' asked Sam jocosely.

But Willie's eyes were closed. 'If I fall down,' he sighed, 'and a deathly pallor creeps over me, force open my teeth with a knife, and pour a single drop of this blood-red cordial down my throat—'

'How can you pour a drop ?' interrupted Sam.

'Unless it's too late,' Willie continued faintly, 'you'll see the colour slowly returning to my cheeks and suffusing them with the glow of life ; and then, after you all thought I was dead, I'll open my eyes and say : "Where am I ?"'

'Does he have fits ?' Katherine whispered in my ear, but I shook my head.

'You needn't be afraid. It's only *Monte Cristo*.'

Katherine looked at Willie gravely and wonderingly, but he had already put away his bottle and crammed his mouth with bread and sardines—the sardines she herself had brought.

From the darkness below, the sound of the waves rose up, lonely and sad. The warm ruddy light of the fire flickered across fresh young faces ; a pungent delicate fragrance was blown down from the mountains ; and the smells of heather and of burning wood were mingled with the salt smell of the sea.

After supper most of the boys lit the cigarettes Gerald had handed round ; and these, combined with the food, helped to establish a more companionable atmosphere. In fact I had decided that everything was now all right, when Sam Geoghegan announced suddenly : 'I'm a Socialist.'

I glanced at him, but the others took no notice. Whether they were conscious of it or not, the beauty of the night had cast a vague spell upon them, and they were content to be lazy and quiet. So would I have been, only I was suspicious of Sam's remark, and still more of the tone in which it had been uttered.

'Do you mean like the chaps who were round last week with the cart?' somebody asked indifferently, after a long pause.

'They gave one of the wee books they had with them to my father,' Sam continued. 'I was at the open-air meetin' too.'

Even this failed to arouse interest, and it was only Willie Breen who said, after another pause: 'What is it?'

'What's what?' asked Sam gruffly.

'A Socialist.'

Sam said his eyes in our direction before replying 'A Socialist's a man that believes in Socialism,' he said; 'and Socialism means that every body gets the same chance. There's no classes nor privileges nor capitalists nor private property—nor one family bein' richer than another.'

'But when you've got things you *are* richer,' objected Willie Breen, unconvinced.

'You don't have things,' returned Sam contemptuously. 'Isn't that what I'm tellin' you? Everythin' belongs to the State—an' the State belongs to everybody. There's nobody poorer than the rest—nor richer cether.'

'Those lads that were round here tried to get up a collection, all the same,' put in Robbie McCann. 'They must have been poor.'

'Of course they were poor,' said Sam, pityingly. 'You can't give up everythin' an' be rich, can you? At least not till everybody else is made to do the same.'

His manner was merely his usual manner—aggressive and offensive—but I felt that his remarks were deliberately directed at the visitors, and deliberately intended to annoy them.

'Would *then* aunt have to give up her place?' Willie Breen asked, jutting his head towards the Dales.

'Why wouldn't she?' Sam growled. 'Does it belong to her?'

This was a novel idea, and Willie only said: 'Of course it belongs to her.'

'Not rightly,' Sam went on. 'The point is that nobody has a right to anythin'—more'n anybody else, I mean.'

'You know quite a lot about it, don't you !' Gerald murmured languidly, for Sam's eyes had been fixed on him from the beginning, in a kind of hostile challenge.

'I know as much as you do,' he retorted.

Gerald smiled and shrugged his shoulders, and I thought it better to intervene. 'We needn't start a row, need we ?' I said.

'I'm not startin' a row,' grunted Sam truculently. 'What call has he to put in his jaw ? He wasn't asked to come. Him and his silver cigarette-case !'

'He *was* asked,' I replied.

'Ay—maybe by you.'

I did not answer. It wasn't worth while, for the others weren't backing him up. Even his own particular chum—Robbie McCann—had just accepted a second cigarette. Besides, they didn't really like him ; he was always quarrelling.

'Let's tell stories,' Willie Breen proposed. 'Do you know how they make castor oil ? There was a woman told me she saw it. It was a big round room, and corpses hanging from hooks in the ceiling. Yellow drops were falling from the ends of their toes into basins. That was castor oil.'

'I'm sure,' Sam sneered.

'I'm not sayin' I believe it,' Willie defended himself.

'It's a wonder then, for you'll believe most things.'

Suddenly a deep low boom rose up from the sea, as if coming from an immense depth—swelling out like the heavy bass note of an organ, and dying away.

It was rather startling, and Katherine laid her hand on my arm. 'What was that ?' she asked.

'Nothing,' I answered. 'At least, I don't know.' But a vague sense of awe had impressed itself on most of us.

'It came last summer for the first time,' said George Edge, a boy who had not spoken before. He had been lying on his back, looking up at the stars, but he now raised himself on his elbow and gazed out over the dark water. He was not exactly one of the village boys, he was the doctor's son, and only lived at home during the holidays. 'You'd think it was some kind of explosion under the sea,' he went on. 'My mother doesn't like to hear it. It frightens her.'

There followed a pause, and then the sound came again—floating up, weird and mysterious, though this time more faintly. We drew closer round the fire and began to talk of other things, but the conversation took a darker tinge.

‘It was here that the murder was,’ said a boy hidden in the shadow of a rock. I could not see him, and it was as if a disembodied voice had spoken out of the darkness.

‘Just over there,’ said George Edge reluctantly.

‘What murder?’ Gerald asked.

The voice from the shadow spoke again. ‘It was a man called Dewar done it. There was two of them comin’ home one winter afternoon from Annalong—O’Brian and Dewar. O’Brian, they say, had been gettin’ money that was owed him, and they both had their load of drink. It was dirty weather, an’ no one on the road, an’ maybe they fell out about somethin’. Anyhow, next day they got O’Brian down below there on the stones half in the sea and half out of it—an’ the face of him all bashed in you wouldn’t know him. Him and Dewar was seen leaving Annalong together, and they got Dewar lying drunk in his own house, an’ some of the money. The day before he was hung he confessed.’

‘How did he do it?’ Gerald asked.

‘He bashed him in the face with a lump of rock, an’ then threw him down into the sea. They say there’s nights when you can hear O’Brian. It’s like this.’ He gave a long low wail that shivered up to a cry.

‘I’m goin’ home,’ said Willie Breen, rising to his feet.

‘Wee scaldy!’ jeered Sam. ‘You’ll have to go down the road by yourself then, an’ you’ll meet him as sure as death. You’ll know him too, because he won’t have any face on him, only a lock of blood. An’ Dewar with him, with his neck broke, like this.’ Sam’s head drooped horribly to his shoulder, and his eyes flickered and closed.

Willie Breen sat down again.

‘When you talk about ghosts it’s supposed to bring them near,’ said George Edge. ‘It gives them a kind of power over you.’

‘For goodness sake stop all that rubbish,’ cried Katherine indignantly. ‘Can’t you see you’re frightening the child out of his wits?’

‘Go to her, baby. Hold her hand,’ mocked Sam.

Willie turned angrily on his protectress. 'I'm not frightened,' he spluttered. 'It's you that's frightened. You shouldn't be here at all. There shouldn't be any women in the club.'

'Faith, he's right there !' Sam agreed.

But George Edge, sitting up, pointed out to sea. 'Listen,' he said impressively.

We all sat still, Willie Breen with very bright, wide-open eyes. A moment afterwards, with a blade of grass held between his thumbs, Sam produced an unearthly screech in the little boy's ear. It was too much, and Willie set up a howl.

The rest followed quickly. Katherine leaned forward and gave Sam a resounding box on the ear : and with that all was tumult and confusion. Sam was on his feet ; we were all on our feet ; and Sam, red as a turkey-cock, was blustering of what he would do if Katherine weren't a girl. Then he spied Gerald, and gave him a blow in the chest that sent him staggering nearly into the fire. 'That's for you, you "get."'

The other boys immediately surrounded them, but Gerald neither spoke nor returned the blow. I saw his face, and it had turned white : but he did nothing, he was afraid. That he should be, disgusted me, though I was far more angry with Sam. It had been he who from the beginning had made all the trouble. I waited just long enough to give Gerald a chance to face him if he wanted to ; then I struck him myself—and struck as hard as I could—with my open hand, on his cheek. It was the second smack he had received within five minutes, and even in the excitement of the moment I couldn't help feeling amused.

It settled matters at all events, though not in the way Sam wanted. He wanted a fight with Gerald, for he was a bully really, not a fighter, and had the bully's instinct as to whom it would be safe to attack. We stripped to our shirts and trousers, and moved out into the moonlight. Katherine, though she made no attempt to interfere, still hovered in the background, but Gerald had disappeared.

I looked at Sam's big fists. I knew he was heavier than I was, but he was softer too, and I had never been afraid of him. Now I had a cold determination to hurt him. We chose seconds, and there was a time-keeper, though nobody had a watch.

As he stepped into the ring the nervous tremor of Sam's mouth, which he couldn't control, gave me a cruel pleasure I had never believed much in his pluck, for it was always with smaller boys that he picked his quarrels. Now I felt confident. Neither of us had any science, but I at least was in earnest.

It was in the middle of the second round, and we were both panting and my nose was bleeding, when Michael, the policeman, appeared on the scene, springing up as if from the bowels of the earth. How he came to be out of bed and in this particular spot at such an hour, I don't to this day know; but he stepped ponderously in between us and stopped the fight.

'Well now, this is nice goings-on!' he exclaimed loftily. 'Will you tell me please what it's all about?'

'You go quietly to hell,' said Sam in a low voice.

The others chimed in. 'It's none of your business, Michael, we're not in the town.'

'Do you tell me that, now? Well, I'll be troubling you to return to the town this instant minute—every one of you. It's no place for you, Miss,' he added, having suddenly discovered Katherine in the background, 'with a lot of young rascals that'll be sore and sorry in the morning when their parents hear from me. Come now, and I'll see you safe home.'

But Katherine did not move.

'Let them finish, Michael,' George Edge said in an undertone. 'Nobody'll ever know you were here. There'll be no talk at all.'

Michael frowned, and visibly wavered. He enjoyed a fight as much as anybody, but the presence of Katherine obviously both perturbed and puzzled him, for of course he knew who she was. He turned to her again, but she had withdrawn into the shadow of the rocks, whither he followed her, and they spoke together in inaudible tones. Then he came back. Katherine had disappeared, possibly she had followed Gerald, who would hardly have gone very far without her. Indeed, she must have, or be waiting till the fight was over, for Michael wouldn't have allowed her to go home alone. Anyhow, I couldn't attend to the matter at present.

'Well, I suppose you'll be wanting to settle this,' said Michael doubtfully.

His words were received with an outburst of laughter.

‘Three cheers for the constabulary!’ piped up Willie Breen. A faint greyiness of dawn was already spreading over the eastern sky.

‘Time!’ called George Edge, and I noticed that he had actually borrowed Michael’s big silver watch.

Chapter 14

NEXT morning I got a rowing-up from my father. Indeed as soon as I saw myself in the glass I knew it would be useless to try to hide what had happened, so I told him frankly that I had been fighting. Fortunately it was not necessary to say anything about our club, nor did I mention Sam’s name. To do him justice, he did not press me about this. I simply told him that the fight had taken place at night to prevent its being stopped, and after that held my peace. My main feeling, in spite of my father’s lecture, was that I was glad it *had* taken place, for I had come out of it victorious, though probably I had received as much punishment as I had given. My forehead and temples—where most of Sam’s blows appeared to have landed—were at any rate richly marked, and would be for at least a week; yet there was nothing I desired more than that Katherine should see me in this condition. I even felt amicably disposed towards Gerald, who after all couldn’t help being a funk. There was just a chance, I thought, that he might come round to inquire how I had fared, for I had seen neither him nor Katherine after the fight. But needless to say he did not come; it was a stupid thought; and in the afternoon I determined to go up to Derryagh.

Willie Breen, who now regarded me in the light of a hero, accompanied me as far as the lodge gate. There he said goodbye, and with Remus I went on to the house, hoping to find Katherine, but only finding Miss Dick.

Miss Dick remarked at once on my battered appearance, though she was too much occupied with a letter she kept folding and unfolding to pursue a searching investigation. In fact I was rather piqued by her lack of interest. ‘My sister, Mrs. Jenkins,’ she began almost immediately, ‘wants me to go and

stay with her. I hardly know what to say about it. I haven't been to see her for a long time, but on the other hand Mrs. Carroll mayn't be able to spare me.'

I knew Miss Dick did not tell me this because she wished to consult me, but merely because there was nobody else there, so I replied carelessly : 'Oh, you ought to go'—and added : 'Where is everybody ?'

Miss Dick ignored the latter words. 'You think so ?' she murmured. 'The last time I went the youngest child developed croup.' She paused, and tapped the letter with her finger before laying it down and drawing on her gloves. I had noticed that she was dressed for paying visits.

'They're none of them what you'd call robust,' she went on. 'They really take after Arthur—Mr. Jenkins, that is—though Sissie always says *he's* stronger than he looks ; which I hope is true, for he looks wretched.'

She broke off—as if in the effort of visualizing Arthur—and I took advantage of the pause to ask for Katherine. Miss Dick regarded me musingly before replying.

'Katherine's upstairs changing her dress : we're all going over to Castlewellan . . . That is to say, Gerald isn't,' she corrected herself. 'You'll find him somewhere outside. He has put up a hammock and says he's going to sleep. He's dreadfully lazy, I'm afraid—and I must say rather irritable too. At least he has been to-day ; I don't know why.'

Neither did I, but I guessed it might have something to do with last night.

'It's temperament, I suppose,' Miss Dick pursued, glancing at the clock. 'And of course one has always been told that highly gifted people are more subject to moods than ordinary mortals like you and me. It's the penalty they have to pay for their genius.'

Whether it was or not, I didn't relish being lumped with Miss Dick among 'ordinary mortals,' and decided, as I had frequently decided before, that she was a foolish person. I left her, and went in search of Gerald, determining to be extremely tactful, and to show him at once by my manner that everything was all right.

He must have heard me coming, for when I found him he had swung himself out of his hammock and was standing beside

it. Nor did he look in the least embarrassed, which I confess rather annoyed me, in spite of my charitable intentions. 'Have the others gone yet?' he asked.

'No, but they're getting ready to go; I only saw Miss Dick.'

Gerald was quite openly taking stock of my bruises. 'Then we'll give them a few minutes,' he said. 'I suppose the Dick female told you that they're going to pay a call at Castlewellan—which will mean the whole afternoon, thank goodness!'

He looked at me and smiled, and I didn't know what to say. What I wished was that Katherine would occasionally find it worth while to mention her plans beforehand: it never seemed to occur to her that I might possibly want to make plans too.

'They only settled it at lunch,' Gerald continued, evidently reading my thoughts. 'It was Aunt Clara's idea.'

He waited until we heard the sound of the departing carriage; then he said: 'This might be a good time to play to you—if you still want me to. We'll have the house to ourselves.' And taking my assent for granted, he began to stroll back.

I wasn't a bit in the mood for listening to the piano; in fact I felt distinctly cross. It seemed to me that both the Dales were inclined to treat me in a pretty cavalier fashion—as if all I had to do was to fall in with their whims whatever these might be. But I followed him, and we entered the drawing-room by an open window.

'Do you mind Remus?' I asked rather sulkily. 'He'll probably snore.'

Gerald stooped down to pat him. 'I don't mind him if you don't.' And from this I guessed that he really wished to please me.

It made me hesitate. 'He can go round to the kitchen if you like,' I offered; but Gerald smiled and shook his head. He went straight to the piano, while I stretched myself on a sofa by the window.

'I haven't a notion what kind of music you like,' he said over his shoulder. 'But I suppose we'll find out.'

'Play to please yourself,' I told him—as if I wasn't here.'

'I'm playing because you *are* here,' he laughed; 'though it will be to please myself too.'

I warned Remus that he must keep absolutely quiet and listen to the music; he might make himself comfortable, but there

were to be no grunts and sighs. Gerald's head was bent a little over the keyboard : he seemed to be thinking. I watched a tendril of clematis waving softly above the open window, and every now and again I breathed in the sweetness of a sprig of mignonette I had gathered in passing. My thoughts floated out through the quiet afternoon while I waited . . .

I knew nothing about music : we had our local church concerts, to be sure, but I can truthfully say that I had never heard any real music in my life. I listened now, as a tune came to me across the room, with a curious whiteness, like the whiteness of water. I half shut my eyes, and lay absolutely still. I was completely ignorant, nevertheless it seemed to me that the beauty of Gerald's playing must be extraordinary. Even to-day I have this impression. It may have had many faults ; he may have been incapable of doing all kinds of things that professional pianists can do ; he may have been, and probably was, deficient in power ; I don't know. He seemed to me to caress the notes rather than to strike them ; he seemed literally to draw the music out ; and the whole tone had a liquid singing quality such as I have never heard since except in the playing of Pachmann. As I listened, the music gathered force and sombreness. Then it passed again into the clear soft tone with which it had begun . . .

Gerald had stopped, and I said nothing. Soon, however, he began again. The summer afternoon—the big cool shadowy room—had become full of lovely voices, which flickered, like waves of colour, across my senses. Pensively, half-reluctantly, a simple melody untwined itself on the air, with a strange hesitation and indecision, rising and falling, faltering, repeating itself, resting on a single note in a kind of desire that lingered, gathered intensity, and finally dropped back.

He was playing to *me*, I felt, and it had a curious effect—almost as if he were speaking to me. What did it really mean to him ? What, I presently wondered, *was* he expressing ? His playing would alter, would grow gayer, or a kind of sadness would creep into it. In the end he stopped abruptly, and got up from the piano, while I thanked him. I knew he knew that he had given me a tremendous pleasure, so there was no need to say much. He told me that the music I had been listening to was all by one composer.

'What was that last thing?' I asked.

'One of the Studies—the one in A flat. I can't play anybody else. I don't mean that other things are more difficult—some are much easier—but they don't suit me so well.' He was silent until he added: 'I may as well tell you that I'm not so good as you think.'

'I'm sure you are,' I answered, 'though I haven't told you yet what I do think.' The music had wakened in me a strange feeling—a kind of regret for things that seemed to have happened long ago and could never happen again.

I tried to explain this tenuous idea to Gerald, while his eyes remained fixed on me. I don't know why, but I somehow felt that he was not interested in, was indeed only half listening to, what I was saying. He came over to sit beside me, and instinctively I got up and stood by the window. The action was quite involuntary, and I regretted it immediately, for, though he said nothing, I saw I had offended him. I wished it hadn't happened, but it had; and moreover it had broken the current of sympathy which his playing had created. What took the place of this was a feeling of constraint; and on his part, I was afraid, of resentment.

But all this was below the surface. Whether he was annoyed with me, disappointed in me, hurt by me, or not, he was the last person to betray it in so many words. I wanted to say or do something to remove the impression I must have given him, but it was too late, for at that moment a servant appeared carrying a tea-tray, which she set for us outside on the terrace. We went out, accompanied by Remus, who at the rattle of cups and saucers had thrown off drowsiness like an old coat. He sat up beside my chair, watching me. Every time I looked at him, he instantly responded with half a dozen rapid wags of his tail, before resuming his attitude of motionless attention. There being nobody there to prevent me, I gave him about half the cake.

It helped—for me at least—to cover an awkward situation; though it did not remove it. Gerald, whenever I glanced in his direction, averted his eyes. Then, to my great astonishment he asked suddenly: 'Did you get much hurt last night?'

I at once stopped feeding Remus. 'No, not much,' I answered.

‘And the other—I forgot his name—Sam something?’

‘Oh, Sam’s all right,’ I told him.

But I was puzzled: it seemed to me extraordinary that he should deliberately revive what could hardly be for him a pleasant recollection.

‘Do you think I should have fought him?’ he persisted.

‘Do you think I was afraid?’

I looked away. His questions seemed to me unfortunate, and I wished he would let the matter drop. ‘I didn’t think much about it,’ I muttered under my breath.

‘That of course isn’t true,’ he returned at once.

I did not reply, and he went on: ‘I suppose you think it’s pleasant to be thought a coward!’

‘I’m sure it isn’t pleasant; but I can’t imagine that it matters a great deal to you what I think.’

A deep flush spread over his face. ‘You’re stupid, then—after all!’ But he stopped, and I could see him struggling with something which in the end he swallowed down. When he spoke next it was in a different tone. ‘Of course, if I hadn’t done what I did, you wouldn’t have had *your* opportunity.’

‘No,’ I said, and a long silence followed. ‘I *had* been stupid, I supposed, but it was at least partly his own fault. What had he expected me to say?—that I thought he *hadn’t* funkcd Sam? At any rate there was no use sitting on like this, and I got up. ‘Well, I think I’ll have to be moving along. Thank you for playing to me. Come, Remus.’

He did not try to keep me, nor offer to come with me, nor even look at me. ‘Good-bye,’ he said; and after a brief hesitation, not knowing what else to do, I left him there.

Chapter 15

KATHERINE had several times promised to let me make a drawing of her; but the days passed, we did other things instead, and it was not until one afternoon nearly a fortnight later that the first sitting took place. Meanwhile, though I had been up at the house every day, I had seen much less of Gerald, and couldn’t, help suspecting that he was avoiding me.

So, possibly, did she ; for after I had been working for a while she began to talk about him, and in a way that I felt sure would have annoyed him intensely had he heard her. 'Gerald likes you,' she said ; 'and he doesn't often like people. I wish you would be friends with him.'

'I am friends with him,' I answered. 'Please sit as still as you can.'

I had decided to make my sketch out of doors and in water-colours, and had chosen a position on the lawn at some little distance from the house. 'Where is he now ?' I went on.

'He's gone out by himself.'

The words had a faintly reproachful sound, as if this were my fault. 'Aunt Clara doesn't seem to get on very well with him either,' she added, 'though she's asked us both back for Christmas.'

'Well then——'

But she did not allow me to finish. 'I suppose that night when we went with you to your club has something to do with it. I don't see why you can't forgive and forget.'

'But I've nothing in the world to forgive,' I protested. 'And I haven't the slightest feeling against him. That's quite wrong.'

'Why does he think you have, then ?'

'I don't know. Are you sure he does think so ?'

'I'm sure there's *something* the matter, and I'm sure you could make it all right if you tried. *He* won't.'

I did not dispute this—partly because I didn't want to discuss the question at all, and partly because I couldn't attend to two things at once, and at present I was attending to my picture.

I finished my pencil drawing and began to paint. The other picture had been painted indoors, I reflected ; and by the other picture I meant the portrait of Prudence Carroll, which for some strange reason I couldn't banish from my mind. It kept floating in between me and my work, and I seemed to see it as clearly as I saw Katherine herself. This, naturally, did not help me ; still, I persevered, though my progress from the beginning was slow and unsatisfactory. Katherine had more or less relapsed into silence, though occasionally she would make a remark and I would reply to it—rather absent-mindedly, I confess, for what she said penetrated only the fringe of my consciousness. She had brought a book with her, and by and

by she stopped talking and began to read aloud ; but this too I only partly took in. I had an odd feeling that we were being watched. I knew, or half knew, that it was merely my imagination ; I even knew what had suggested the idea to me—nevertheless it presently became so strong that Katherine must have noticed something. She stopped reading. ‘What are you looking at ?’ she asked.

‘Nothing,’ I answered guiltily.

But she had turned round in her chair, and was gazing back at the house herself, as if she didn’t believe me.

I dipped my brush in water and remarked quietly : ‘It’s just that I thought I saw someone at a window—the third window from the left—upstairs.’

Katherine shaded her eyes with her hand. ‘I can’t see anybody,’ she murmured : ‘the sun catches the glass . . . If there is anybody, it must be one of the maids, for everyone else is out.’ This luckily gave her another idea. ‘Instead of staring at us, she might have had the sense to bring us out tea. I’ve been dying for a cup for the last half-hour, only I didn’t like to disturb you.’

‘She hasn’t been there half an hour,’ I replied meekly ; ‘but I’ll go and tell them. Promise you won’t look at what I’ve done while I’m away.’

Katherine promised, and resumed her book.

I walked back to the house, but not till I was quite close did I glance up at the windows above me. Needless to say, there was nobody there.

In the hall I hesitated, at the foot of the broad low staircase. Should I go up ? I leaned against the banisters and listened, gazing aloft into the cool shadowy silence. I don’t know what I should have done in the end, for at that moment I heard a door opening near the kitchen, and directly afterwards one of the servants appeared. I told her that Miss Katherine would like tea brought out, and went into the morning-room myself for a folding-table, which I carried back with me.

I set the table down beside Katherine, looked at her, and looked at my drawing. ‘Tea will be ready in a few minutes,’ I said. Then I handed the drawing to her, for it was a failure, and there was no use going on with it.

‘Don’t hold it so close to you,’ I cried, and Katherine stretched

out her arm full length, gazing critically at what I had done.

‘I think it’s quite good, you know—if it wasn’t meant to be me. But it’s no more like me than Adam.’

‘Don’t be so rude. Of course it’s like you.’

Then I saw the maid approaching with a tea-tray, and as soon as she was gone I seated myself on the grass at Katherine’s feet. When we had finished tea I still sat there.

I pointed down through the trees. ‘Do you see that strip of yellow sand?’ I asked. ‘It always reminds me of a particular poem.’

Katherine was not fond of poetry; she had told me so more than once; nevertheless I couldn’t help repeating the verses aloud for my own pleasure, in a sort of sing-song, laying tremendous emphasis on the tune.

*‘It was many and many a year ago,
In a kingdom by the sea,
That a maiden there lived whom you may know
By the name of Annabel Lee;
And this maiden she lived with no other thought
Than to love and be loved by me.’*

I went through the whole six stanzas, and when I had finished I looked up at Katherine, and saw that she was smiling. She was amused, but there seemed to be something else too—or I fancied there was. ‘It was written about this place,’ I declared; ‘about just that strip of yellow sand, and that sea.’

‘And just this little boy, I suppose,’ Katherine made fun of me, laying her hand on my hair.

I narrowed my eyes under her touch. ‘Tell me about him,’ said.

‘What shall I tell you?’ she murmured, lulling me with her voice, and beginning to stroke my hair.

‘I don’t know. Something. Anything.’

‘That I like him?’ she asked, as if it were a sort of pretending game—and I dare say it was, for her.

‘Yes—if you really do.’

‘Then, I do.’

‘How much? What do you like about him?’ I questioned gerly.

'I don't know,' she laughed.

'You must know. Tell me.'

'Well, I like the way he looks : the way he pouts when he's cross—which is very often : the way he asks questions : even the way he hesitates before certain letters—b's and p's, for instance—so that you can see what he's going to say before he says it.'

I felt intensely happy. I leaned back my head and looked straight up into Katherine's dark-blue eyes. I could see nothing except that clear dark blue. Then she bent lower and her lips lightly touched my forehead.

Almost at the same moment I heard the swish of petticoats rustling through the grass behind us. I sat up straight, but did not look round till the rattle of tea-cups had ceased, and the maid who was bearing them off had nearly reached the house.

'Gracious ! I hope she didn't see me kissing you,' Katherine exclaimed, half laughing, half annoyed.

'I'm sure she did, but what does it matter ?'

'Of course it matters,' Katherine answered. 'If nothing else, it must have looked idiotic. And it was all your fault.'

'How was it my fault ?' I protested. 'I didn't ask you to kiss me.'

'Yes you did—by telepathy. And I'm sure she's telling the cook about it at this moment. *She* doesn't think you're a little boy. Get up.'

I knew she wasn't really much perturbed, but I obeyed her and began to put away my colours. Then we went back to the house, where I left my painting materials on the window-sill. We went down to the shore, and as we walked along the hard sand by the edge of the sea I wanted all the time to tell Katherine how much I cared for her. I felt I must tell her, and that it was an admirable opportunity—if I could only get the first plunge over. But I couldn't. White seagulls were swooping and wheeling over the dark-blue water, crying their lonely cry, and the foam of the waves was white as snow. 'I *will* tell her,' I kept on repeating inwardly, yet all I did was to talk about the regatta that was to take place on Saturday, and of the chances of a fine day. I had entered for two swimming races and a diving competition, and Katherine declared that *she* was coming to watch me. We kept on talking like this. I

thought George Edge would win the swimming races because he always did, but I thought I was pretty certain to win the diving competition. Katherine hoped I would. And so it went on. As if I cared! As if it mattered! Why was I so shy? Surely I had received sufficient encouragement!

If it *was* encouragement?—that was my next thought. Encouragement of a kind, perhaps— but I couldn't tell what kind. Faintly sentimental possibly. She had kissed me deliberately. On the other hand, she had kissed me in a way that didn't in the least suggest that she wanted me to kiss her in return. Rather the opposite. The kiss had not been given to me, but to the little boy in the poem. In fact I wasn't a bit sure that she took me seriously at all.

Chapter 16

AND as it turned out I didn't win the diving competition, I wasn't even second; my defeat being brought about largely by my own eagerness to show off.

On that Saturday the village was a holiday village. The men and boys perspired freely under thick clumsy Sunday suits, the women and girls were decked out in all kinds of finery—bright dresses, ribbons, and cheap but vivid hats. Why was it, I wondered, that these garments should have the property of bringing out in their wearers an appearance of coarseness I never noticed at ordinary times? Even the garments themselves were bewildering. Sam Gcoghegan's salmon-pink tie, Mr McCann's fancy waistcoat, the peacock-blue dress and white lace collar of Annie Breen—these and their like, when you come to think of it, must all have been deliberately chosen. It was astonishing for really it was difficult to believe that they could represent the taste of anybody.

Every year the same programme was followed. In the morning the regatta—boat races and swimming races—down at the harbour, in the afternoon the sports—foot races, tugs-of-war, wrestling, throwing the hammer, long jumping and high jumping—held in one of Mrs Carroll's fields.

I drifted about in the crowd with a group of other boys

Our swimming races came off fairly early, but I was only third in each, and George Edge second, because a youth, whom neither of us had ever seen or heard of before, turned up and carried off both first prizes. This made me anxious about the diving competition, for which he had also entered. We went in off the end of the pier, where a platform with a spring-board had been erected for us. Then, when we had dived, we swam round to an iron ladder and climbed up to take our turn again. It was the last event of the morning's lot, and had always been the most popular. When the hour came round, having learned in the meantime from one of the spectators that the stranger was an indifferent diver, I had regained confidence, and as the crowd drew in closer to watch us I was fully prepared to show them what was what. As a matter of fact my first two dives were all right, but before my third and last I happened to catch sight of Katherine standing quite close to me, and the result was that I determined to excel anything ever seen. I took a tremendous race, the full length of the platform, but just at the end of the spring-board my foot slipped and I sprawled in flat on my belly. The shock nearly winded me, and the smack I gave the water could have been heard half a mile away. It was extremely painful, and it put me out of the competition; nevertheless, while I clambered up the ladder, I was greeted only by volleys of laughter and humorous remarks. Indeed, my accident appeared to be the most enjoyable event of the morning. It did not seem to occur to anybody, except to one of the stewards, that I might really be hurt. I wasn't, as it happened, but I put on my overcoat and went back to the dressing-shed in a very bad temper.

The field where the sports took place lay about a mile out of the village. Mrs. Carroll and some other ladies were dispensing refreshments, and afterwards Mrs. Carroll would be giving out the prizes. I went up to Derryaghy to call for Katherine and Gerald, but found they were going to ride over, and weren't even sure how long they would stay. It all depended on the quality of the entertainment. Gerald thought it would be a bore—they were going, he said, chiefly from a sense of duty. It was the first time I had seen Katherine on horseback, and she looked to me not only beautiful but some-

how as if she had been lifted to a region far beyond my reach. In her dark-blue riding-habit, with her sparkling eyes and rosy cheeks, she reminded me of the girl in the equestrian portrait by Millais and Landseer, a coloured reproduction of which I had cut out of a Christmas Number and tacked up on the wall of my bedroom. And straightway I saw in myself the rustic page-boy who stands by the gateway in that picture, his eyes fixed in rapt admiration upon his young mistress. They rode away, an amazingly handsome pair, Katherine telling me she would see me later on up at the field. Mrs Carroll and Miss Dick had already proceeded thither in the carriage, so I was left all by myself, to find my own way.

At once I decided that I wouldn't go to the sports. If Katherine chose to leave me like this, I wasn't going to run after her. In any case, what would be the good? So I mooned about, nursing a sense of injury, yet at the same time building up a romance on the equestrian portrait motif. I imagined myself dying: some accident had happened to me; and suddenly Katherine rode up and, springing from her horse, threw her arms round me, kneeling in the blood and dust on the road. She kissed me passionately, careless of all the people who watched her, repeating over and over again: 'I love you—I love you—I love you'

I lingered over this tragic scene till by dint of repetition it ceased to thrill me: then I went into the house and hunted about for a book. Half a dozen had come down from the library in town, and with a couple of volumes of *Tro on a Tower* under my arm I made my way to the shore.

Gradually in the warmth of the sunlight I grew drowsy, and the sound of the breaking waves, and the harsh crying of the gulls, soothed my disappointment and built up an enchanted world about me, where I was shut in with the romance of the tale I was reading. By and by—after two hours perhaps,—I closed my book, though still keeping a finger in the place. I reflected that nobody up at the field had spent such an afternoon as I had spent, and I compared my intellectual pleasure with their rough commonplace pleasures. This brought me a comforting sense of superiority, and my thoughts turned once more to the story I had been reading. My sympathies were entirely with Lady Constantine and her youthful

astronomer, but more particularly with Lady Constantine. The very fact that she was so much older than her lover appealed to me. Her gentleness ; her intense femininity ; her dark eyes ; the softness of her skin ; the perfume of her hair and the delight of her caresses—these were present to me vividly, almost physically—and I rejoiced in the love scenes in the tower with a frank and innocent sensuality, filling in the picture, where it was incomplete, from my own imaginings . . .

Chapter 17

DURING that last week of August, after the Dales had left, 'I wandered lonely as a cloud.' Up till the eve of their departure—in spite of sundry disappointments and sorenesses—I had been happier with Katherine than I had ever been in my life before ; but as soon as she was gone I felt forlorn and deserted. Added to this was an increasing dread of the new existence I saw opening out before me. I distrusted it : I had indeed that instinctive distrust of life itself, which contemplates the unknown with uneasiness, and clings with passion to familiar faces and things.

When the day of my departure, Saturday, came round, and I saw my box standing all corded and ready in the hall, I was in the lowest spirits. Now that I had said goodbye to Mrs. Carroll it was as if I had cut myself completely adrift from the past, and yet I believe I should have been willing enough to go had I not been going to these McAllisters—relations of my father's—the only relations I had ever heard of. They lived in Belfast ; Aunt Margaret was my father's sister ; and her husband kept a shop in a street called Cromac Street. I had never been to their house, but they came down once or twice every summer to spend a day with us ; and they were pretty awful. There were four surviving children (several had died in infancy), but George, the eldest, was the only one about my own age. I got on well enough with him : Uncle George, too, was not so bad ; but Aunt Margaret I detested. And to live with them !

Mrs. Carroll had wanted to send me to school in England,

but my father would not hear of this. He had an idea, and nothing could shake it, that English public schools were dens of vice. This he had gathered from some article in a review, and possibly also from the story *Eric*. I, being what I was, was scarcely likely to resist temptation : at all events he wasn't going to put it in my way when by sending me to the McAllisters he could provide me with the 'influence of a religious home.' For Uncle George was religious, and so was Aunt Margaret ; while the younger George was a communicant. It was the thought of all this, and the prevision of what awaited me, that now lay so heavily upon my mind.

I was not to go up to town till the afternoon, and as we sat down to our early dinner I could not, though I knew it was useless, refrain from taking up the subject again. I had an instinct—which as a matter of fact was perfectly sound—that the McAllisters were not what my father believed them to be. After all, I knew George wasn't. Nor was my unwillingness to live with them prompted by any feeling of snobbishness such as I could see was attributed to me ; it was prompted by distrust. My father was the worst possible judge of character. He seemed indeed totally blind to it—blind to everything except creed ; either that or else he must have thought the two to be inseparable. Once again I told him how much I should prefer living in lodgings of my own. If they were more expensive, Mrs. Carroll wouldn't mind

'Whether she would mind or not,' he replied, 'I should have thought you wouldn't have wished to put her to additional expense. Besides, you must see yourself that it's too late now to change.'

'But she wouldn't mind the expense,' I repeated. 'She told you so. I could stay at Uncle George's till I found rooms.'

'You know very well that that isn't the question,' my father said, patiently enough. 'I've explained why I think it better that you should be with people who will look after you. You're a great deal too young to live by yourself in a large town.'

'I don't like the McAllisters,' I answered sullenly. 'I don't want to live with them. And Aunt Margaret doesn't like *me*.'

It was a pity that our last meal together should have been an embittered one, but it was, and it was not wholly my fault.

My father might at least have compromised to the extent of allowing me to come home for the week-ends. Instead of this, under the impression that what I needed was to get into surroundings which would more or less counteract the supposed relaxing influences of Derryaghy, he had arranged that I was to stay during the entire term with the McAllister family

No more was said upon the subject, and after dinner he gave me a little book called *Daily Light*, which he made me promise to read every night and morning. I kept my promise too—kept it because it was a promise—even during a period when it rather sickened me to keep it

He came to the station to see me off, and, as we were far too early, he was obliged to stand for a quarter of an hour at the window of the carriage, while I longed for the train to start, and we both tried hard to find something to say. I was tormented by an uncertainty as to whether he would expect me to kiss him when I said good-bye. To avoid this, at the sound of the guard's whistle I abruptly thrust out my hand. We shook hands awkwardly, and, with the train beginning to move out of the station, I sat back in the corner of the empty third-class carriage

I had a sense of leaving everything behind me, as if I were starting for the world's end, and curiously enough, as much as, or even more than by any human face, I was haunted by a vision of Derryaghy House. I had forsaken it, and I heard its low faint call coming to me through the rain. I could see the silent rooms upstairs, the long passage with its row of portraits and the tall windows at either end—and it was as if a dust were dropping down upon these things, covering them to sleep till I should return. The friendly ghosts slipped back into their picture-frames gradually the life died out of their eyes; and a cold unbroken stillness, like the chill of winter or of death, closed over all that secret world. Out of doors the apples had begun to redden on the garden walls, but within the house all was frozen and still. They were *my* spirits, *my* ghosts, I protested passionately, and could live only while I loved them. I loved them now, but I was too far away, and I might not find them there when I came back. It might not be the same when I came back, I myself might not be the same, nothing, I thought gloomily, might ever be the same again

The landscape gliding past me showed through a floating greyish mist. It was cold, and I pulled up the window, which almost immediately became covered with the same mist that drifted in the air outside. I wondered where Katherine was and what she was doing. I had not heard from her, though I had written twice. Then I leaned back in my uncomfortable corner and tried to think of nothing.

Chapter 18

AT the other end I was met by my cousin George, a big-boned, red-haired hobbledohoy of seventeen, with a curiously small face, small, glinting, squirrel's eyes, and a freckled skin. George, I remembered, could be amusing, in a broad and vulgar fashion: he could at any rate make me laugh, and when I saw him standing on the platform my spirits rose a little. I proposed that I should send on my luggage and that we ourselves should walk. I saw nothing unusual in this arrangement, which was common enough at home. George, it is true, seemed surprised, but after the railway journey I wanted to stretch my legs. Besides, town itself was a comparative novelty to me, and I was interested in the streets.

Just now, it being Saturday afternoon, in spite of a drizzling rain they were full of people, and at the end of Queen's Bridge some kind of noisy meeting—religious or political—was in full swing. We did not stop to listen, but soon afterwards, turning to the left, entered a long straight dingy-looking street lined with unattractive shops. There was a liberal sprinkling of public houses, cheap clothiers, grocers, and second-hand furniture dealers, while here and there the gilden sign of a pawnbroker hung out over the greasy pavement. We walked on, and I was on the point of asking why he had chosen such a disagreeable route when George touched my arm and announced cheerfully: 'Here we are.'

'Here!' I echoed in unconcealed dismay.

'Yes; we live over the shop,' George explained. But he had noticed my momentary recoil and had coloured.

I pretended to have been astonished that we had reached

our journey's end so quickly, but I don't think George was deceived. Inwardly I was furious with my father for arranging for me to come to live in such a place, with the gas works and a public lavatory hardly ten yards away. The narrow street, the mean drab houses, the mean drab people, the noise and rattle of lorries and trams—all were far more unpleasant even than I had anticipated. It wasn't quite a slum perhaps, but it was little better.

'We haven't been here long,' George continued. 'We used to be round the corner in Donegall Pass.' Then, as I stood motionless on the pavement : 'Aren't you coming in ?'

He had pushed open the door, and a bell had instantly responded with a clear decisive ring. Inside, the shop was divided into two compartments—one stocked with pipes, tobacco, cigarettes, and sweets ; the other with newspapers, magazines, stationery, and cheap novels in paper bindings. In the tobacco department there was nobody ; in the stationery department a young woman was moving about, fixing things. She turned round on our entrance and George introduced me : 'My cousin Mr. Peter Waring, Miss Izzy.'

Miss Izzy and I shook hands. She smiled brightly upon me and hoped I was well. At the same time she took stock of me rather closely, and I had a feeling that her verdict on the whole was favourable. For my own part, I observed that Miss Izzy had a lot of glossy brown hair, which was twisted up in a coil on the top of her head and fastened there by ornamental skewers. She wore eye-glasses, and was neatly if somewhat mannishly dressed in plain dark-blue serge, with a white linen collar and white cuffs. It was obvious that Miss Izzy possessed a great deal of style. She had also good features, and a remarkable air of efficiency. To me, indeed, she was an entirely new type : I had never come across anybody who looked nearly so businesslike, and I decided that had I been an employer of labour I should have engaged her on the spot.

Meanwhile George was sprawling against the counter and had begun to pick his teeth with a pin extracted from the flap of his waistcoat. Miss Izzy went back to her interrupted task of arranging a pile of new books. She was working out an elaborate pattern, I saw, with their pictured covers ; and as she did so she read the titles aloud : '*The Hour of Vengeance—The Clue*

of the *Broken Ruby*—*Cynthia Cyrilhurst* . . . It's well for people that have names like that,' Miss Izzy observed ironically 'I don't think much of it,' said George

Miss Izzy shrugged her shoulders 'It's better than some, anyway,' she replied

'Don't you like your own name?' I ventured shyly, which caused her to turn and regard me in surprise But next moment she smiled 'My Christian name's all right,' she admitted 'Though what's the use of being called Althea if it isn't going to be backed up by anything?' Althea Izzy is just waste'

'You can easily remedy that,' George declared gallantly, and this time Miss Izzy did *not* smile 'It wouldn't be McAilister that would do it,' she returned dully

George, having concluded his dental experiments, carefully inspected and replaced the pin Evidently he was accustomed to these little passages with Miss Izzy, for a kind of playful leer had overspread his countenance 'I hear Miss Johnson's gettin' married at eight o'clock next Friday,' he remarked slyly

Miss Izzy bounced round, knocking over some boxes of notepaper 'How do *you* know?' she demanded, glaring at him

'Oh, I just heard,' said George with a grin 'A little bird told me'

'Through the keyhole, I suppose,' Miss Izzy retorted 'It strikes me there're too many little birds in this house And they don't want it talked about—mind that!'

'Why don't they want it talked about?' I asked

It wasn't that I wished to know why—or indeed took the slightest interest in the matter—only Miss Izzy happened to be looking at me and I felt impelled to say something His voice immediately lost its edge, it was clear to me that she held very much the same opinion of George as I did myself 'She's in a bakery,' Miss Izzy explained, 'and he's a clerk in Nicholl's, so if it got out, the church would be full They want a quiet wedding'

It was all completely new to me—this world into which I had come—a world as different from my own rural, village world as it was from Mrs Carroll's I felt disheartened and utterly out of my element But just then Uncle George appeared.

He came in from the street and shook the rain from his hat—a quiet grey little man, whose air of cheerfulness was directly contradicted by his eyes ; and whose movements—timid, furtive, and ingratiating—somehow suggested the movements of a small dog in a strange room. I had always felt a certain sympathy with Uncle George, partly because I strongly suspected that Aunt Margaret bullied him, but chiefly because he was gentle and kindly and in many ways resembled that small dog. In appearance he was vague and colourless—rather like a faded photograph—with resigned submissive eyes which peeped out diffidently from under absurdly fierce and bushy eyebrows. I knew that he had failed twice in his business, and it was hard to imagine him succeeding. On the other hand, he was an active member of his church, spoke frequently at religious meetings, and held, in a milder and less aggressive fashion, the same strict views as my father.

‘How are you ?’ he asked, shaking me warmly by the hand. ‘We’re very glad to see you. And how’s your father?’ Uncle George’s left eyelid closed as he put these questions, so that anybody unacquainted with him might have supposed that he was winking very knowingly.

‘I’m quite well, thank you,’ I answered : ‘we’re both very well.’

‘Haven’t you been upstairs yet ? Haven’t you seen your aunt ? Why didn’t you take him to see mother, George ? Well, come along now : it must be nearly tea-time. I think you might leave the shop, Miss Izzy, and come too—a special occasion, you know ; a special occasion !’ He laughed softly and patted me on the shoulder.

‘Thanks, I’ve had my tea already,’ Miss Izzy returned drily. ‘And you’re having yours upstairs,’ she added, seeing him move in what apparently was the wrong direction.

‘Oh, upstairs ! In honour of this young man ! A special occasion, a special occasion !’ He repeated his pleasantry, chuckling and rubbing his hands together, while it was all I could do to keep from returning his wink.

‘I’d rather stay here than be running up and down every time the bell rings,’ Miss Izzy went on, the invitation to tea for some reason appearing to rankle in her mind. From behind, his father’s back George blew a kiss to her.

The welcome I received from Aunt Margaret was much less convincing than Uncle George's had been. She was a large, obese woman—dark, middle-aged, and with a peculiar smile that always made me feel uneasy. When she smiled her lips parted and her teeth became visible, but otherwise her face underwent no change. It was somehow not a smile at all, but a grimace, and apt to disappear with startling suddenness. Aunt Margaret wore a wig, and this, I think, helped to make her look queer—even slightly uncanny. I had been told that she suffered from some mysterious internal disease, which at times caused her great pain, but though she was white and fat and puffy, she presented no appearance of being an invalid.

Uncle George asked if tea would soon be ready, but she gave him no answer; only smiled in her strange fashion, and began to question me about my father and my journey—one would have thought I had been travelling all day. Two small boys held her by her voluminous skirts—my cousins, Gordon and Thomas. They were about six or seven, I suppose, and remarkably ugly—the kind of children who have perpetual colds and are seldom provided with pocket-handkerchiefs.

I shook hands with Gordon and Thomas; I really couldn't do more, though both had raised damp red-nosed little faces to be kissed. Their mother, however, noticed my omission; and though she said nothing, I was convinced that she would remember it.

Not that it mattered. Her dislike of me dated to a far earlier period than our present meeting, and was far too deeply rooted to be removed by anything I now did or said. Just then the door opened and another child entered the room. This was Alice—a little girl of ten—who completed the family. Alice I did not kiss either, and looking up I saw my aunt's hard black eyes fixed upon me. They had acquired a remarkable grimness, but I gave her back stare for stare, and she turned away with that curious grimacing smile I hated.

Alice herself did not appear to resent my undemonstrativeness: she hung on to my arm and laughed up at me as if we were the greatest friends in the world. She was a strange nervous, elf-like child, with a pale face and big black eyes which were not hard like her mother's. She looked as if she had been allowed all her life to sit up too late. She was small

for her age, and extraordinarily fragile. She was like a little figure cut out of a Some drawing

Meanwhile Uncle George had removed his boots, and was sitting before the gas stove, presenting the soles of two flat grey-socked feet to the red bars. A light steam began to rise from them, and Uncle George declared that his new boots must 'let in,' and that he had a good mind to take them back to the man from whom he had bought them. I sat down close by, and talked to him, while I watched the steam floating up from his feet. Aunt Margaret had begun to lay the table. Alice hovered behind my chair—every now and again leaning over the back of it to say something. Finally she brought a book to show me, and while I looked at it she put her arms round my neck and kissed me.

'Run away now Alice, and stop bothering Peter,' said Uncle George, good-humouredly. 'It's queer the way she's always taken to you,' he added in a gratified whisper. 'With most folks she's as shy as a mouse.'

Alice retreated, but very soon came back, and again put her small white face close to mine and looked at me with her black eyes. She gave me an impression of a little house haunted by queer and not too pleasant ghosts, yet at the same time I felt vaguely sorry for her, and stroked the thin hand that rested on my sleeve, delicate and light as a leaf.

'You're a lovely big boy,' she whispered in my ear, rubbing her face up and down against my jacket, as if it had been the fur of an animal.

I couldn't help laughing, and she cuddled closer against me, her chin on my shoulder. Just then the thunderous approach of a traction-engine set everything in the room rattling, and I felt her tremble. I put my arms around her and held her tightly till the noise had passed.

When we sat down to tea Alice insisted on sitting beside me. I had an idea, possibly suggested by Miss Izzy's words, that the room we were in was not often used. I hoped it wasn't, for it was stuffy and uncomfortable. The windows had to be kept shut because of the dust and din from the street, and beneath the table space was so exiguous that I felt everywhere the warm proximity of other people's limbs. I was unused to being cramped in this way. I felt, too, that all the time I must be

breathing other people's breaths ; and once having got this notion into my head, I couldn't forget it.

The furniture was worn, the carpet was worn. The curtains, the vases and ornaments, were cheap and gaudy. I even preferred our parlour at home, where, if things were not less hideous, there were at any rate fewer of them. Here, as well as the inevitable texts, several pictures adorned the walls, and a large engraving hanging directly in front of me was the first example of its kind I had seen. It represented a young man in armour, for the possession of whom two classically draped females were struggling : one flaxen-haired and virtuous, I supposed ; the other dark and wanton, for she held a champagne-glass in her hand, which she waved aloft like a torch.

'A fine picture ! A fine picture !' Uncle George commented, pleased by my fascinated gaze. 'It's a Royal Academy picture that. "The Choice," they call it. You can see the lesson, Peter, that the artist had in mind.'

Yes, I saw the lesson ; and the words 'Royal Academy picture' recalled to me my first walk with Katherine ; while the picture itself, or rather its ethical intention, reminded me of my old friends in the 'Golden Ladder Series.'

But I hoped tea would not last much longer, for a large plate of cheese, cut into thick yellow slabs, was making the atmosphere unpleasantly heavy. Moreover, when this cheese was offered to me in conjunction with pink-sugared biscuits, I didn't quite know what to do. I wasn't hungry ; I had refused several things already ; and I knew Aunt Margaret thought I was turning up my nose at the food provided for me. Provided specially too—as I could guess from the eager glances of the others—because it was my first evening. So I accepted the cheese and sugared biscuits, and struggled through them. 'The English eat pickles with their cheese,' Uncle George remarked inconsequently. 'It's a matter of taste, I suppose—or maybe, you might say, a matter of stomach.'

After tea the younger George inquired if we were going to have 'worship' now or later ? We had it 'now,' and as soon as we rose from our knees he proposed that he and I should 'go out for a bit.'

'Go out where ?' Aunt Margaret questioned at once ; but George was vague, and didn't know where.

'Oh, just for a dander,' he thought. 'It's faired up, an' anyhow we don't want to sit in the house all evenin'.'

I was nothing loath, and clattered down the stairs after him ; but as soon as we were in the street George's uncertainty vanished. 'Did you ever see a boxing-match ?' he grinned ; and when I shook my head and asked why : 'Well, because you're goin' to see one now. Only for the Lord's sake don't say anythin' about it at home.'

'Aren't you allowed to go ?' I asked, and George chuckled in appreciation.

'Allowed ! What do you think ? Da's notion of an enjoyable evenin' is some Sankey an' Moody touch.'

We turned down a side street, and then another and another, till I completely lost my bearings : but George presently said : 'Here you are, Cocky ! Now for a bit of life.'

He pointed to a building at the opposite side of the road, where, above the entrance, a round purplish globe threw down a pool of light on the wet pavement. A number of men and youths in caps and mufflers were hanging about the door, talking in guttural voices and spitting freely ; while, a little removed from these, some small boys looked on respectfully, George pushed his way through the group and bought tickets from a pock-marked but genial person, who wore a black patch over one eye. We needn't have been in such a hurry, however, for when we entered there was only a sprinkling of spectators in our part of the hall, though the seats at the back were crowded.

'That's the thunder an' lightnin' behind you,' George said humorously. 'How'd you like to be in among them ?' But the stragglers who were dropping in and taking their places all round us did not seem to me to be appreciably different.

A branch of lights hung from the ceiling, and other lights fell from the flies on to a curtainless stage. A thick grey cloud of smoke already floated in the air, and a sickly-looking youth was hammering out popular tunes on a toneless piano. The platform was quite bare, except for three double rows of wooden chairs that composed three sides of a parallelogram, within which a space was marked off by a thick rope stretched between four stout posts clamped to the floor. Over this rope, at two diagonally opposite corners, hung towels ; and in each of

these corners was a chair, a heap of sawdust, a basin, a sponge, and a water-bottle.

The house was now rapidly filling up, and the audience—entirely male—was of a rougher and tougher class than I had ever hitherto encountered. 'Twig the peelers,' said George; and I noticed half a dozen policemen taking up positions in different parts of the hall. At about five minutes to eight even the chairs on the stage were filled, and at eight sharp an important red-faced person with a cigar stepped into the ring and made a short speech introducing the first pair of boxers. He retired amid applause, but the boxers, to my surprise, turned out to be a couple of half-grown, ill-nourished boys no older than myself. They were naked except for short linen drawers, and it seemed to me that it would have been an excellent plan to have put them in a hot bath prior to their appearance. They grinned sheepishly at the spectators, amongst whom they recognized 'pals,'; and the 'pals,' in turn, greeted them with encouraging cries of 'Go it Bob!' 'Go on the wee lad!' 'Go on the stripes!' This last in allusion to Bob's simple costume, an ancient pair of bathing-drawers.

They shook hands in a silly nervous fashion, without looking at each other, and began to spar feebly. Bob was so thin that you could count his ribs, and the big gloves at the ends of his skinny arms looked like gigantic puff-balls. The 'wee lad' was sturdier, but he struck me as being very nearly a hunchback. And even to my inexperienced eyes it was perfectly obvious that the main concern of both was to avoid getting hurt. The audience thought so too, and the first round was not finished before they gave expression to their opinion by boos, and cries of 'Take them off them! Take them off them!' The allusion, I supposed, was to their gloves, but other and more objectionable things were shouted, and I reflected that George had certainly managed to steer clear of the 'Sankey and Moody touch.'

The referee cautioned the combatants, but the second round was no better than the first, so the fight was stopped. The better-dressed occupants of the stage chairs, and the more rowdy persons in the back seats, had not paid their money for stuff of that sort. There followed a fresh pair of boxers—older, tougher more determined—and this time things

were sufficiently brisk. It was a hard ding-dong struggle, and at least exciting. True, at first sight of a dark ugly streak of blood on one of those white faces, I felt a little quaver. In fact my impulse was to retire ; but as round after round passed, and I watched, in each, the blood from the same wound bursting out afresh, my disgust changed to enjoyment. I wanted the fight to be a real fight : the dirty hall, the low faces, the shouted comments, had quite ceased to matter : I was eager for a climax ; there could be only three more rounds ; and I wanted, before the last, to see somebody knocked out. The man whose face was bleeding was the heavier of the two, but I thought he had no chance. He must have thought so himself, yet he fought on with a kind of dogged stupidity. His seconds squirted water into his face, sponged him, fanned him, slapped him and kneaded his muscles ; but the artificial invigoration so produced did not last long, and, as I watched him weakening, I could almost feel myself delivering the jabs and punches that dazed him. Bruised and battered, smeared with blood, he seemed to me more beast than human when he entered the ring for the last time. There was a blow, and a crash on the boards. The referee stood over him, counting ; but he did not move ; the fight was ended.

And now, George told me, we should have what was to be the fight of the evening. Indeed, from the outset, I saw that it was different in quality—cleaner and much more scientific. Yet actually I was disappointed and bored, finding it dull, because there was no knock-out, and the decision was given merely on points at the end of the twelfth round.

Out in the street again, George and I cagerly discussed the show. Boxing matches were all right, we decided, and probably less dangerous than football matches. We talked a good deal in this strain, though I didn't believe a word of it really, and when we were half-way home said so. 'It was all pretty beastly,' I remarked, 'and that's why we liked it.'

To my astonishment, George flared up as if I had insulted him. If *he* had thought it beastly, he wouldn't have waited on till the end, as I had done !

I glanced at him in surprise. He may have been speaking the truth, but I didn't believe he was, and my opinion of him, never very high, sank lower still. We walked the rest of the

way in silence. He was sulky and resentful, and showed it, though as soon as we reached the house he became friendly again. This also surprised me, for I had not then discovered that the one thing he could not bear was to be left to his own society.

After supper we said good night and went upstairs, George preceding me to show me the way. He lit the gas in a back bedroom at the top of the house, and I asked : 'Is this my room ?' for I noticed that it contained two beds.

'Yes—yours an' mine,' George answered blandly.

His reply was unexpected. Even among my least pleasant anticipations it had never occurred to me—nor, I was sure, to my father—that I should not have a room to myself. I said nothing, however, but George who was far from stupid, saw or guessed that I disliked the arrangement. 'There isn't any other room,' he admitted frankly. 'I thought you knew. I thought ma put it in her letter.'

'I didn't see her letter,' I replied, though I was certain she hadn't put it in. If she had, my father would have mentioned it. He might still have insisted on sending me, but that was another matter.

'We'll be all right together, won't we ?' George pursued amicably. 'You can have whichever bed you want ; I don't mind ; though the one with the clean sheets is meant for you.' He had already begun to undress, but after removing his jacket he took a photograph from an inside pocket, and handed it to me. It was the photograph of a woman of low type, but I don't suppose that George himself thought her beautiful. The attraction was that she was naked.

'I've better ones than that,' he said with a peculiar smile. He went to a corner near the window, and raised a loose board in the flooring. From the hollow beneath he drew out a large fat envelope, but as he looked at me he hesitated. 'I'll show them to you some other time,' he said, and returned the envelope to its hiding-place. Then he finished undressing and got into bed.

I took longer. I first unpacked most of my things : then I read *Daily Light*. And all the time I was undressing I saw George's small glinting eyes fixed on me curiously. I hated this lack of privacy. It wasn't that I hadn't undressed hundreds of times before other boys, when we were going to bathe ; but this was different. I disliked the feeling of not being alone.

I hated to have somebody watching me—at any rate in the way George was watching me. I determined to write to my father in the morning.

When I was in bed and in the dark I began to think of Katherine. I did this every night, in fact I looked forward to it, because it seemed to me that this was the hour when everything became clearer. Besides, there was always a chance that if I thought of her I might dream about her. But George began to talk.

‘Do you know any girls?’ he asked.

‘No,’ I answered shortly.

‘Don’t you like them?’ George persisted.

‘No.’

He laughed unbelievably. ‘What do you think of Miss Izzy?’ Not so bad—eh?—if it wasn’t for the specs.’

‘I don’t know anything about her,’ I replied.

George was silent for a minute or two. Then, undiscouraged, he said lightly, ‘That means you’re not much struck.’

I did not answer, and was just beginning to think my own thoughts when he started once more. ‘She’s not much in my line either. Too high-an’-mighty—as if she owned the place. She’s nothin’ compared to Miss Johnson anyway—the girl we were talkin’ about to-day—who’s gettin’ married. Miss Johnson was in the shop before Miss Izzy came, an’ they’re friends, though they’re very different. Miss Johnson liked a bit of fun, an’ could have had all the boys she wanted. She’s marryin’ well, too. Ma sacked her for givin’ lip. Ma sacks them all.’

I still said nothing, but in spite of this George talked on until he grew sleepy.

Chapter 19

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NEXT morning I was awakened by somebody singing, and opening my eyes I saw George, in his shirt and trousers, strutting up and down the middle of the floor, a hair-brush in his hand. It took me a few seconds to realize where I was, but George, when he saw I was awake, proceeded to give me imitations of various music-hall artists, until there came a sharp rap at our

door, and Aunt Margaret's voice told him to remember what day it was. With that I myself remembered, and simultaneously made up my mind that I wasn't going to church. I determined that while I was away from home I would be my own master, do just what seemed good in my own eyes, and that I would begin this policy at once.

Our room, as I have said, was at the back of the house, and from where I lay I could see through the window a strip of sunless sky, across which the branch of a thin dark tree waved. As I watched it my mind strayed to a book of Japanese drawings, to the library of Derryagh, and to other things dear to me. The contrast was chilling. I had already guessed from the little I had seen of the McAllisters that their fortunes were waning. It was not so much that everything in the house was worn and patched and on its last legs, as that I seemed to scent that indefinable atmosphere of anxiety, worry, and struggle, which accompanies a decreasing ability to pay one's way. It depressed me; I hated all that it implied—ugliness, discomfort, sordid economics, and a ceaseless struggle to keep up appearances. In the midst of these reflections George informed me that I had better get up.

He himself was nearly dressed. His red hair—at present oiled to the colour of treacle—was carefully plastered down, and he was examining his small freckled face in the looking-glass. George had not yet begun to shave, I supposed, though he ought to have, and there were long silly-looking hairs growing on his chin, which he now proceeded to clip with a pair of scissors. I thought he looked not exactly ugly, but horribly common, as he stood there.

When we went downstairs we found the others at breakfast, and the whole family was in its best clothes. Gordon and Thomas wore green plush costumes with mother-of-pearl buttons. It wasn't their fault, poor children, but the result was none the less appalling. Their damp red little noses seemed to have been set that very morning accidentally in the middle of their faces, which were of the complexion of fresh putty, while their eyes looked exactly like blue glass marbles. Uncle George, who was breakfasting in his shirt sleeves, suggested that I might like to go with George to the Bible Class, but I refused. I mentioned at the same time, in fulfilment of the

policy, that I preferred to take a walk on Sunday mornings. 'Do you go for walks when you're at home?' Aunt Margaret asked, and when I told her I didn't: 'Won't your father expect you to go to church?' she said, with her peculiar smile.

'I don't know what he'll expect,' I answered. 'We didn't discuss the matter.'

'And don't you yourself think you ought to go?'

'No,'—for I was quite clear about this at least. And I added that once you were familiar with doctrines, whether religious or secular, I couldn't see what was to be gained by hearing them repeated.

This view, which struck me as eminently rational, appeared to irritate Aunt Margaret, though she only said acidly, 'I would rather you didn't speak like that before the children. They've been brought up to regard religion with respect.'

'I think I'll go for a walk too,' George at this point put in, with the result that might have been anticipated.

'You'll do nothing of the sort,' Aunt Margaret cried, flaring up into shrill anger. 'You see what comes of such talk! I'll have no Sabbath-breaking in this house!'

'Ssh—ssh!' Uncle George interposed. 'To force people to do things against their will isn't always the best plan.'

He might have said that it never was, yet Aunt Margaret turned on him in a flash. 'You'd like your children to give up going to church, then? You'd like them to grow up godless atheists and idolators?'

'Nobody is giving up going to church,' Uncle George said, trying to calm her. 'George is coming of course. Young people sometimes say things without attaching very much meaning to them, and if Peter wishes to take a walk this morning, I'm sure he'll come out with us this evening to hear Doctor Russell. Won't you, Peter?'

I mumbled a sort of half promise, and peace was restored.

Nevertheless, it was a dreary day. In the afternoon I accompanied George, and we loafed about Ormeau Park, where he was accustomed to meet his friends. These friends were all in business and all looked upon themselves as young men. They smoked cigarettes, wore their handkerchiefs in their sleeves, stared at passing girls, and had two topics of conversation—Minnie Cunningham, who had been dancing and singing at the Empire

Music Hall, and the individual merits of professional football players. I could get on quite well with George when he was alone and when he wished to be agreeable, but his friends, among whom he appeared to be remarkably popular, did not improve him. Nor did it require much perspicacity to discover that they on their side regarded my company as a very questionable acquisition, and this opinion they took less and less trouble to disguise as the afternoon wore on. George gave them a burlesque version of our adventure of last night. To have an appreciative audience was his greatest joy, and, since he really did possess a certain gift for low comedy, he was allowed a free stage. Now that he had the others he ignored me completely, and I found myself practically alone, in the disagreeable and humiliating position of silent hanger-on. I might of course have left them, only I had the feeling that this was what they hoped I *should* do. Therefore I didn't; though I made up my mind that in future I would go out by myself.

Chapter 20

ON Monday morning I went to school. I arrived twenty minutes before the proper time, and as my classes had already been arranged, I had nothing to do but loiter about and take stock of the place. It stood—a long, low, unlovely building of soot-darkened brick—in its own grounds, not far from the centre of the town. Later on I got rather to like its unrelieved bareness, but just now, on this dull grey September morning, it presented to my apprehensive gaze a somewhat gloomy and forbidding appearance. Beside the main building was a Preparatory School, and at the back, separated from it by a quadrangle, where a score or so of boys were at present kicking about a football, where the Mathematical Schools. Beyond these was a large playing-field with white goal-posts.

As I hung about, not venturing to join the other boys, I felt nervous, shy, and very much alone. Not one of those faces had I ever seen before, and contrary to my expectation—derived from school stories—nobody approached to ask me my name, nobody indeed paid the slightest attention to me.

More boys kept on arriving every moment, at first in ones and two, and then in whole flocks, till it seemed to me that I should never get to know half of them even by sight. Several masters passed, disappearing through mysterious doors, and when, punctually at ten o'clock, a white-haired, white-bearded patriarch emerged from the porch, ringing a huge handbell, and I watched my schoolfellows disappearing with extraordinary rapidity in various directions, it looked to me as if I might very easily spend the entire day in that yard. I had no idea which door to try, so I tried none; yet at the same time I was alarmed at the thought of being late. I was still hovering in uncertainty, gazing at windows and doors, endeavouring to make up my mind, when a boy, running past, glanced at me, stopped, and asked which classroom I was looking for.

I told him Mr Lowden's.

He pointed: 'Over there—the end door on the left,' and hurried off before I had time to thank him.

Coming in, I found the whole class already in their places, but a boy at the end of the third form moved up to make room for me. There was a passage down the middle of the room and on either side of this the benches and desks rose in tiers, with the master's desk at the top. But Mr Lowden was not at his desk; he was standing facing the class, with a piece of chalk in one hand and a duster in the other. He looked at me reproachfully, asked me my name, and then informed me in a dejected voice that I was late, that he disliked unpunctuality, and that it was a bad beginning. I said nothing, but took down the sum he had just written on the blackboard.

I worked at it, and was struck by the animated conversations that were going on all over the room, in spite of Mr Lowden's feeble efforts to check them. He was a feeble person, I could see, and there was a sort of tearful, yet faintly spiteful whine in his voice.

'Has anybody finished?' he asked, and the boy who had made room for me held up his hand, cracking his fingers. I glanced sidelong at him. He had a lazy good-humoured face, and an expression of placid impertinence.

'How often have I told you not to crack your fingers, Knox?' Mr. Lowden murmured discontentedly. 'Well, what answer do you get?'

'Ten bob, a duce an' a make.'

Mr. Lowden cleared his throat. He looked, I thought, very white and ill. 'Come in to-day, Knox, at recess,' he said wearily.

He wrote down another sum, and I had begun to copy it, when something exploded with a sharp report under my feet. Mr. Lowden, who was gazing straight at me, instantly told me to come in at recess.

I knew, of course—for it was a very ancient trick—what had happened; that I had rubbed my foot on a wax match softened and rolled up with the head inside. I told Mr. Lowden I hadn't done it on purpose.

'I can't help that,' he answered, 'you must stay in.'

For a moment I was too astonished to be indignant. 'But it wasn't my fault,' I said. 'I didn't know it was there.'

'You must stay in,' repeated Mr. Lowden, in a silly obstinate voice, horribly irritating. 'And Knox, you must stay in after school as well as at recess.'

'I don't see what *he* has to do with it, anyway,' I muttered.

'Oh yes; Knox put it there,' Mr. Lowden replied; and since Knox merely smiled, I concluded that he *had* put it there, but I conceived on the spot a dislike for Mr. Lowden.

This dislike was strengthened a few days later, when he directly accused me of lying. It was partly my own fault, I admit. He had read aloud a not very complicated problem which we were to solve mentally, putting down our answers when he gave us the word. My answer was right, but when he asked me how I had arrived at it, I couldn't tell him, because the problem itself had vanished from my mind. For the life of me I couldn't remember it, yet I was ashamed to say so, and simply sat silent while he kept on repeating as if it were a refrain: 'Well now, how did you work the sum, Waring?

As I was unable to tell him, and wouldn't give the reason why, he decided that I must have copied the answer from Knox.

'I didn't,' I protested angrily.

'Then why can't you say how you got it? You must be telling a lie.'

'I'm not telling a lie.'

Mr. Lowden shrugged his shoulders apathetically. He never did more than that—never got angry, or even moderately interested, no matter what where the circumstances. 'If you're

not telling a lie, why can't you say how you worked the sum ? If you had done it once you could do it again.'

'I did do it,' I repeated, but he merely shook his head and wrote down my name for detention.

Oddly enough, it was the triviality of the punishment that most exasperated me. If it had been more severe I should have minded less. But its triviality seemed to imply that Mr. Lowden took the untruthfulness of his pupils for granted. I thought he was a poor sort of creature, and to my dislike was now added contempt.

The increasing aversion I felt for him, however, was really founded on other and less reasonable grounds. Physically he was repulsive to me. He suffered, I imagine, from some affection of the lungs or of the throat, for he wore, winter and summer, a thick white scarf, fastened by an opal pin. His face was cadaverous and hollow-cheeked, his moustache long and scanty, his hair dank ; but what repelled me most—apart from that opal pin—was his peculiar odour. Whether this emanated from his body, from his breath, from the pastilles he was perpetually sucking, or from all three, I didn't know. It was nauseating and persistent, though perceptible only when you were close to him ; and for some obscure reason I unfortunately associated it with approaching dissolution. Mr. Lowden was dying, I felt sure, and what I smelt was death. When he sat down on the form beside me to work out a sum, instinctively I would begin edging away from him, until at length he would notice it, ask me in a querulous, suspicious voice what I was doing, and perhaps keep me in.

When I think now of those who were in charge of my education, I cannot help being filled with wonder. What did they ever teach me ? What did I ever get from them that I could not have got with much less trouble for myself ? That kind of school, I imagine, no longer exists. Even then it must have been nearly at its last gasp. It was not, in spite of my first impression of it, a particularly big school—perhaps a couple of hundred boys ; certainly not many more—yet never once did any of the masters show the faintest interest in me, or make even the most perfunctory attempt to get to know me—to get to know what I was capable of, if I had any definite tastes, if I were good or bad, intelligent or a fool. What they did instead was to ask me a couple of questions from a book, and,

if I failed to answer these satisfactorily, keep me in to sit for twenty minutes with that book open on the desk before me and my thoughts miles away. Of them all, only one, Mr. Johnson, had the least distinction, and he, unfortunately, was a mathematician. Not that it would have made much difference if he hadn't been, for he rarely attempted to teach. But he had written a Euclid so perfect in its expression that he had managed to get a kind of æsthetic charm into the dry bones of geometry. He was an Englishman, though Jewish in type. He wore a long, flowing beard and moustache, and had small sleepy eyes which during school hours were usually closed. Most of his time he passed in reverie or slumber in his chair on a dais at the end of the room, but when aroused—which happened about once a term—he had a richly terrifying voice, and a startling way of slashing down a long black cane on the desk within a few inches of your nose. His classes were models of order. Never the faintest sound. In dead silence you played your game of noughts and crosses, or did your Latin composition, or wrote out cricket teams : only with the greatest precaution you even moved.

Of all those whose business it was to mould my mind, his figure remains the least spoiled by time. I remember the shock of disillusionment I received when, some years after I had left school, I came upon Doctor Melling, the headmaster, seated in the Campo Santo at Pisa, sucking an orange. It was not the orange that disillusioned me (I should have taken that as a sign of courageous independence had he been in his own country), but the fact that he looked so hopelessly insignificant, dowdy and mediocre. Even in stature he was curiously shrunken, though he neither stooped nor showed signs of decrepitude or old age. But Johnson I can see now as I saw him then, coming up the path between the two front cricket fields, a large black bag in his hand—which one had been told contained his lunch. I can see him leaning back in his chair, the very picture of inertia, his eyes closed, like one of those beautiful owls who ignore from their cages in the zoo the staring stranger, his beard spread out over his waistcoat, his long, shapely hands folded on his stomach. He alone among them all was a gentleman—I had recognized that at the time—and though he knew nothing of, and cared nothing for, boys individually, if, out of school hours,

chance brought him into temporary relation with one, even an unmathematical one, he took it for granted that he was a gentleman too, and into his deep slow voice and sleepy eyes there would come a peculiar charm.

Chapter 21

I HAD formed no definite conception of what my new school would be like, but there was a flatness about the reality for which I was unprepared. I seemed to slip into my place at once, and, as week followed week, it all grew duller and duller. I did not play Rugby football, which was the only game played that term. I got to know a good many boys, but I formed no friendships. I found my new companions little if at all more congenial than the boys at Newcastle, in spite of the fact that there were so many more to choose from. I liked them well enough and got on with them well enough, but when school was over, in my free hours, I felt no further desire to see them.

I thought a good deal about Katherine, and wrote to her regularly, but got only an occasional scrappy note in reply. I was far too much alone. I should have seen little of George even, if we had not shared the same bedroom ; for after he got home from business and had had his tea he went out with his friends, while I was busy preparing my work for the next day. But my father had ignored my complaints, and at night we were still together, and he liked to talk, and did talk, before going to sleep. In this way he gained a peculiar influence over me—insidious, and inexplicable, for my opinion of him remained unaltered. He could amuse me, make me laugh, but I thought him coarse and unscrupulous—callous, boastful, and mean. Frequently he repelled, and sometimes he disgusted me, though by some instinct he always seemed to know when he had gone too far, and I suppose because I was weak and susceptible to flattery, he could usually regain the ground he had lost.

His influence was bad—absolutely—and yet what was harmful to me did not, so far as I know, have any particular effect upon George himself. He had a naturally lascivious mind, and in this direction a power of vivid suggestiveness. As I

became more used to him things that had at first shocked me ceased to do so. Certainly it was unfortunate that I should have been thrown so intimately into his society just at this time. Had I been either older or younger, or had I possessed other friends, it would have mattered less. It was not that I hadn't heard my share of indecent talk before. But this was essentially different—as if deliberately designed to an end. At all events, the other had passed off me easily—awakening no afterthoughts and leaving my imagination and senses untroubled. It was not so now. My mind became disturbed ; and, above all, my dreams were coloured and haunted by the images and scenes he took a pleasure in evoking. In my dreams his suggestions became realities, while George's own imagination seemed to brood over them like an evil angel, inspiring and directing them. It can hardly be that he himself was aware of this—conscious, I mean, that what for him probably was no more than a sort of prurient diversion, which he could put aside as easily as one closes a book, assumed with me a more insistent and tormenting form. Nevertheless, I am not sure ; he may have known. His words affected me physically, with an almost tactual directness. He had a trick of retelling stories he had read (for strange to say he was fond of reading), twisting them and altering them ingeniously so as to introduce the element he loved ; and he never became crude or brutal till he had carefully prepared his ground. I ought to have been able to stop him. It would have been quite possible—and indeed I had done so several times in the beginning. The fact that, as the weeks passed my attempts grew feebler and feebler, means, I suppose, that actually my will was divided.

Chapter 22

Two months went by in this fashion, and I had begun to look forward to Christmas and to count the weeks that still separated me from the holidays, when an incident occurred which was the means of my forming an acquaintance that was to develop into the most intimate friendship of my life. It happened in this way.

A series of thefts had been committed, thefts of school books.

A boy would leave his books down on a window-sill, or even in a classroom, and when he came to get them again one would be missing. I had never lost anything myself, and knew nothing of what was going on until that afternoon when the matter was brought before the whole school.

It was not far from three o'clock—the hour when we broke up for the day—and I was in one of the English classrooms, where, every Monday, if you liked to pay half a crown a term extra, you had the advantage of a lesson in elocution from Mr. (or was it Professor?) Lennox. Lennox, at all events, was a fat, pasty-faced, absurd little man, with a strut, and a high-pitched tenor voice that struck against the drum of your ear like the blow of a stick. He waxed his moustache, and greased his hair into carefully arranged, solid-looking locks, while his skin, by some natural process, greased itself. Professor Lennox was in his way a dandy, wore lavender trousers, crimson waist-coats, large breast-pins, spats with pearl buttons, and rings more dazzling than precious. On the day I allude to, the entire class—a very large one, composed of big boys and little boys—was reading after him, line by line, a poem from Bell's *Elocution*.

*In arms, the Austrian phalanx stood,
A living wall, a human wood,
Impregnable their front appears,
All horrent with projecting spears.*

Or, as it sounded according to the local pronunciation, shared alike by the professor and the majority of his pupils :

*In arms, the Orstrian phalanx stude,
Ah living wall, ah human wude.
Impragnable their front appears,
All hoarent with projecting spears.*

We had just reached 'projecting spears,' when Dr. Melling, better known by the name of Limpet, came in, followed by an old woman, who paused on the threshold. Limpet turned round and waved her forward impatiently, but a couple of yards from the door she stopped again, and all the time she was staring hard at us, with small, sharp grey eyes. These alert, yet furtive

eyes, that hooked nose and pointed chin, taken with her air of timidity, gave her the appearance of a refractory and frightened witch who had been dragged from her lair very much against her will. I wondered who on earth she was, but Limpet did not leave us long in doubt. It appeared that some boy had stolen a number of school books, the property of various other boys, and had sold them to this woman. The matter had been going on for some time—a book or two every few days—and now she was here to identify the thief. Limpet explained the situation with an air of wishing to get a disagreeable duty over as quickly as possible, but to everybody else it was most exciting. Each of us in turn stood up to undergo the witch's scrutiny. She had already, as I afterwards learned, been round the other classes, and Limpet, who had accompanied her on this voyage of discovery, was by now in a thoroughly bad temper. Obviously he found the whole business distasteful, and as one boy after another received her nervous head-shake, he fidgeted and frowned more and more. She herself looked scared and bewildered, being secretly worried, I dare say, about her own share in the matter. As for me, I felt for the first time as if school life really bore some faint resemblance to the tales in the *Boys' Own Paper*. Here was one of the pet adventures actually taking place, and when it came to my turn to stand up I had an inexplicable desire to be picked out as the culprit. Doubtless if I had been guilty it would have been otherwise, but being innocent I had a mind to be the hero of this thrilling episode, and stood so long waiting to be identified that Limpet told me sharply to sit down, and I could see had it on the tip of his tongue to give me an imposition. My neighbour tugged me by the jacket, and I resumed my seat abruptly, amid suppressed laughter. One by one each boy rose in his place and sat down again ; and then, in the back row of all, a boy stood up who *was* identified. This boy I did not know except by name. He was called Gill, and I had always looked upon him as rather odd and unapproachable. When his turn came, he stood up indifferently, glancing out through the window at the school clock, which only became visible when you were on your feet. But next moment I saw the old woman murmuring something to Limpet, and the latter instantly told Gill to stand out.

Gill stood out, his indifference gone, his face flushed and angry.

'Is that the boy?' Limpet asked, as if daring her to say so. Nevertheless, the old woman did say so, though in a mumble which I could not catch.

'Do you know anything of this, Gill?'

'No.'

I was somehow pleased that he had not added the customary 'Sir.' He stood with his head up, gazing straight at Limpet and the witch in a kind of wrathful contempt, his grey eyes dark and very bright, a frown on his face.

The witch was so obviously uncertain and uncomfortable that the whole thing appeared to me ridiculous, and impulsively I gave voice to this impression. 'She doesn't know him at all,' I said. 'She's only trying it on.'

Limpet on the spot gave me two hundred lines, but all the same my remark had the effect of disconcerting the old woman, and drawing a wavering expression of doubt from her, which Limpet pounced on, as a cat pounces on a mouse. 'Why did you point to him if you aren't sure?' he snapped, frightening her nearly out of her wits. 'Don't you understand that's it's a serious thing to bring a charge of theft against a boy? Sit down, Gill, I shall want to see you after school.' He was so angry that he forgot all about the half-dozen boys who had not yet stood up, and hustled his companion unceremoniously from the room.

Gill sat staring straight in front of him. His cheeks were still scarlet, but certainly he did not look guilty. He had a dark narrow face—strong and intellectual. His thick rough black hair grew low on an oval forehead, and between his clear eyes there started a high-bridged, somewhat aggressive-looking nose, the most striking feature of his distinctly striking countenance. He had the reputation of being a peculiar kind of chap, and he was sometimes ragged, but very mildly, for he was quick-tempered as well as being strong and active. People thought him unsociable and stand-offish, but anyone could see that an accusation of the kind which had just been brought against him would require to be backed by a great deal of proof.

When the bell rang he remained on in his seat while the rest of us went out. I hung about the porch, watching two little boys playing chestnuts, and when they stopped playin'

I still hung about, with nothing to watch, and with, indeed, no very definite purpose in view. Presently Gill emerged, but whether he saw me or not, he took no notice, and passed by, walking swiftly down the drive.

I thought this strange, seeing that I had spoken up for him, yet perhaps on that very account my interest in him had deepened, and before he had gone twenty paces I made up my mind and hurried in pursuit. He looked round at the sound of footsteps and waited. I had an idea now that he must have passed me deliberately in the porch, for he received me without a smile. Nor did he gratify my curiosity concerning his interview with Limpet. Secretly I was dying to hear about this, but hadn't the courage to question him, he looked so cross. I made a few attempts at conversation, to which he replied curtly, and then, just as we reached the gate, his mood seemed to change, and he asked me abruptly if I had read any of the writings of Count Tolstoy.

The suddenness of the question, in addition to its unexpected nature, took me aback. Till that moment I had never heard of Count Tolstoy, and said so. But I was not to remain much longer in ignorance. Gill had just finished *Anna Karénine*, and his enthusiasm—once he had decided to talk—was extraordinary. In the end he offered to lend me the book, adding that the translation was in French. I had been learning French in the way one usually does—or did then : that is to say, I had been learning it for five or six years, yet was obliged to confess that I couldn't read it. He changed the subject, however, with the brusqueness that had marked his first speech, and evidently was characteristic. 'Aren't you coming out of your way?' he demanded.

'Oh no,' I assured him—and he gave me a most doubtful look.

'Do you live up the Malone Road?'

'No ; I live in the town.'

'Then, why isn't it out of your way?'

I felt rather a fool, though I thought he might have seen why—or at any rate have allowed the matter to pass. 'I only meant that I wanted to come with you,' I said. 'The rest was politeness.'

He received this with a slight frown : it was clear that he

hadn't yet made up his mind about me 'You haven't been long at school, have you?' he began. 'I mean at this school.'

'No,' I answered. 'Have you?'

'For six years—counting two years at the prep school.'

'I somehow thought you hadn't,' I murmured.

'Why?' he asked at once.

I might have known that he would, and that it would place me in an awkward position. There was no use, however, in prevaricating with a person so bent on extracting the truth. 'You don't seem to have many friends,' I mumbled.

'I've as many as I want,' he replied shortly.

It was not encouraging, and I wondered if I ought to take the hint, yet decided to wait. 'Does that mean you don't want any new ones?' I asked, half laughing, though actually I was serious enough. He turned crimson, began to speak, was silent, and then apologized.

He was certainly rather difficult, from the beginning, his reception of me had been so puzzling that it had had the effect of divesting me of the shyness I usually felt on making a new acquaintance. At the same time there was something about him which I liked, and I determined to persevere. Of course I couldn't get to know him if he wouldn't allow me to, but I was going to try, and I did try—all the way—till we reached his garden gate. There I should have left him, only, to my surprise, he insisted on my coming up to the door. 'I'll get you *Anna Karenine*,' he said. 'then we can talk about it together—if we're going to be friends.' He spoke the last words almost inaudibly, and I knew he had found the greatest difficulty in saying them at all.

'But I can't read French,' I told him again.

'You can if you like. Don't translate it. read straight on as if it were English.'

He went into the house, and in a minute or two returned with a couple of books in grey-blue paper, which he handed to me. 'It doesn't matter if the cover gets torn,' he said, 'or if the books come to pieces. They'll be going to the binders in any case. . . . And by the way—you needn't bother about those lines Limpet gave you.'

'Why?' I asked, not understanding him.

'Because I'll be doing them.'

But I wasn't going to have this. 'Oh rot !' I said.
'It isn't rot,' he returned obstinately. 'You can do them if you like of course, though it will only be a waste of time.'

'I know that.'
'I mean, I'm going to do them in any case, whether you do or not.'

This didn't seem very sensible, and I laughed. 'Couldn't we each do half ?' I suggested.

'No ; I'm going to do them all.'

And since I saw that he was, I said no more.

Very soon, however, another thought struck me. 'You can't,' I told him. 'Limpet would spot it at once. He must know your writing, even if he doesn't know mine.'

'I don't think so. It's not a bit likely that he remembers everybody's writing. Anyhow, you can give me a sample and I'll imitate it.'

Which in the end was what I had to do. I would much rather not have done it ; I still thought it extremely risky ; but he was so determined that, not wishing to make a fuss, I tore a page out of an exercise book and gave it to him.

We walked down the garden path together. 'What's your name ?' he asked.

For a moment I failed to comprehend, and answered : 'Waring.'

'I know that : I meant your Christian name.'

'Oh ! Peter,' I said, concealing my surprise.

'Mine is Owen . . . I'll come part of the way home with you.'

We passed through the gate and turned back towards town, while I pondered silently. His meaning seemed perfectly clear, nevertheless I thought it better to make sure. 'Am I to call you Owen ?' I asked him.

'I don't care,' he answered quickly, without looking at me. But before we had gone another hundred yards he said : 'That isn't the truth. I told you my name because I wanted you to call me by it.'

'All right,' I promised ; and now I was quite sure that I was going to like him.

Chapter 23

THAT night for the first time I felt George's fascination break down, and it is a fact rather melancholy in its significance that this consciousness came to me in the form of a sense of freedom, of relief. He began to talk in his usual fashion as soon as he had turned out the light, but I told him brusquely to shut up, and when he tried to begin again I let him know what I thought of him.

As I lay there I resolved that at Christmas I would make a further attempt to get into rooms of my own choosing. There were other things besides George that moved me to this determination. Owen chiefly—for how could I ask him to such a house? It would be impossible. I was by this time convinced that Aunt Margaret was usually more or less under the influence of drugs. It may have been on account of her illness; I did not know; but there were days when she seemed to be hardly responsible, and at such times she ceased even to try to conceal her dislike for me. I had no idea how long this drug-taking had been going on; I was pretty sure my father was completely ignorant of it; yet she appeared already to have lost something of her hold on reality. I had heard her make statements so obviously untrue that they could have deceived nobody—except perhaps Uncle George. I had heard her repeat a harmless remark made by Miss Izzy, and by altering it ever so slightly give it a quite new and distinctly disagreeable meaning. But Uncle George never dreamed of contradicting her—whether because he was afraid of her, or simply because he was blind. I could not tell.

On the following Sunday morning I happened to be alone in the house with Alice, who had not been very well for the last few days, and had not gone out with the others to church. She was better now, and as usual had climbed up on to my knee, where she was sitting with her thin brown arms round my neck and her queer little face close to mine.

'Ma looked through all your pockets yesterday morning when you were at school,' she told me innocently.

This was pleasant, but I kept a wooden countenance, for I wanted to hear more. 'What pockets?' I asked.

'The pockets of your clothes—every one.'

'Did she find anything?' I murmured, in a tone as indifferent as I could make it.

'She found some letters—everything there was,' said Alice.

'And did she read the letters?' I went on quickly.

'Yes.'

'How do you know? Where were you?'

Alice snuggled closer. 'I saw her.'

'How did you see her?'

'I saw her through the key-hole.'

I reflected in silence. The only letters I ever kept were Katherine's and Mrs. Carroil's—and there was nothing in them that mattered very much. Presently I said: 'I didn't think you would look through key-holes.'

Alice received this with her head tilted on one side. 'Didn't you? I do—often.'

The reply was so ingenuous, so confiding, that it left me rather at a loss. 'You shouldn't,' I told her feebly. 'It isn't nice, you know. You must never do it again.'

'Why?'

'Because it's not a nice thing to do. It's spying.'

'I've often done it,' Alice repeated. 'I've looked at *you* through the key-hole.'

'Well, you must never do it again,' I said. 'Promise or I won't be friends with you any more.'

'If I promise, will you be friends?'

'Yes. But you must keep your promise, remember.'

I returned to *Anna Karénine*, which I had been reading before this interruption took place. 'I must buy a desk,' I thought, 'or some kind of box I can lock up.'

Then Alice began again. 'I've got a secret.'

In the light of her last communication, however, I felt that I had heard enough secrets, and adopted a tone of discouragement. 'Have you?' was all I answered.

'Don't take any soup to-day,' the child said softly.

I laid down *Anna Karénine*. There was something arresting about this injunction, something distinctly ominous. I looked into the strange dark eyes that seemed almost to fill the small

elf-like face, and I knew that a confidence of a highly unpleasant character was imminent.

'I put a dead mouse into the soup,' Alice whispered.

'Oh!' I exclaimed. I felt inclined to put her down abruptly from my knee, and with difficulty conquered this impulse. 'But why——' I began. 'What made you do such a thing? Now it will all be wasted.'

'Nobody knows about it,' the child continued artlessly, rubbing her cheek against mine. 'Once before, I put something in—when people were coming for dinner. It was fun to watch them all looking so solemn, and eating away, and not knowing what was there . . . But I wouldn't do that with you, because I love you.'

'You *have* done it,' I answered reproachfully.

'Yes, but I told you.'

She turned her strange haunted little face to mine, and fixed a long gaze on me. She must have seen the distaste I felt for she began to tremble and her eyes filled with tears. Then she hid her face against my shoulder and clung to me. I was frightened to scold her. Even without my having said anything she seemed to shrink in my arms like some bruised and broken plant. I patted her head gently, and at once she brightened. She got down from my knee and began to dance about on the floor.

Meanwhile, I was left with the problem of the soup. If the soup were strained, the mouse, I supposed, would be discovered; but if, as seemed more probable, it were simply turned out into a tureen, the revelation might come too late. On the other hand, were I to turn informer, Alice would most surely be whipped, and whether she deserved a whipping or not, the mere idea of it was as revolting to me as would have been the ill-treatment of a sick monkey. There was a young girl in the kitchen who looked after the rougher work, and I thought of explaining the matter to her, after swearing her to secrecy, but before I could make up my mind I heard the others returning from church.

They had evidently got back early, and now I didn't know what to do. Uncle George, preceded by Gordon and Thomas in their green plush suits, came straight upstairs. Uncle George began to warm his hands before the gas stove. 'You should

have come out this morning, Peter,' he said in his gentle voice. 'You missed a treat.'

I listened to his comments on the sermon, wondering all the time what I ought to do. Gordon and Thomas tried to climb on to my chair, but I had had enough of the family for the present, and kept them off with a firm hand. The parlour door was open ; probably the kitchen door as well ; for all at once there came a cry from that department—not very loud, yet distinctly audible. I glanced at Alice. She had heard it too, but the others apparently had not, for they took no notice. Uncle George was still in the midst of his mild enthusiasm and Gordon and Thomas, flattening their little round red noses with their forefingers, were practising squinting with remarkable success. Alice had become perfectly still, her big black eyes fixed on mine ; and as for me, I knew that the mouse had been discovered, and felt greatly relieved. It gave me a considerable shock therefore, besides throwing a disquieting light on the mysteries of the kitchen, when the soup, after all, appeared at table. Alice and I did not take any—nor did Aunt Margaret, I noticed—but the others did. Of the mouse I never heard again.

Chapter 24

MY friendship with Owen was at present the one satisfactory thing in my life. At school I was not particularly successful. I worked little, merely sufficiently to prevent myself from getting into trouble ; I didn't play games. I had gone to the School of Art for a few weeks, but, as I was never allowed to draw anything except geometrical designs, I got sick of this and gave it up.

I saw a good deal of Owen, though not so much as I should have liked. Of course I saw him every day at school, but I had never been inside his house, and I could not ask him to mine. I was ashamed to let him see the kind of people I had sprung from. On Saturdays and Sundays we usually went for long walks together, during which we found a great deal to argue about. It was all quite new to me, just as was the peculiar type of Owen's mind, its extraordinary eagerness in the pursuit of ideas. My head already swarmed with the amazing mass of

unsettled notions which buzzed in it like bees in a shaken hive. We discussed books, conduct, justice, morality, free will, religion, the idea of a State. Owen had begun to read Plato and I had finished *Anna Karénine*. We read Herbert Spencer's *First Principles*, and two or three books by Matthew Arnold—*Literature and Dogma*, *Culture and Anarchy*, *God and the Bible*. Owen was not sure of the existence of God, and I, so far as Christianity was concerned, called myself an agnostic also. But there was a difference. To Owen it appeared to matter enormously, he was positively unhappy about it, while I, though I did not let him suspect this, was secretly indifferent. Levine's acceptance of Christianity at the end of *Anna Karénine* was for Owen a source of endless dissatisfaction and query. We talked of it by the hour. Yet when actually reading the book I had been far more struck by the appearance in Wronsky's and Anna's dreams of the strange little man who seems to pass out of vision into reality just before the suicide. What did *that* mean? Why was he there? Had he, like some added flick of colour in the work of a painter, been put in, not because he was there in nature, but because he helped the picture? For me, though perhaps not for Owen, he did do this. He had the effect of making all the rest more convincing, because, while he might appear to be purely fantastic, actually he belonged to another plane of reality, in which I could not help believing. Or was the apparition at the railway station only an hallucination—in that case the vision of a vision? To Owen such a question was of little interest; and it was Owen's questions that, in the beginning at all events, we usually discussed . . .

Very often I walked home with him and hung swinging on the gate while we finished an argument. At such moments he showed a stimulating eagerness, and he was never anxious to get the better of me in merely verbal dispute, as I frequently was of him. It was the thing in itself he saw, and he went at it like a terrier at a rabbit-hole, sending up showers of sand, but never reaching the rabbit. Sometimes, when we were talking, he would catch me by my arms and swing me slowly back and forward. Sometimes he would draw me close up to him till my face almost touched his, and his eyes seemed to look, not at, but straight into, me. He was a queer fellow, extraordinarily clean-minded, generous and conscientious. I had the greatest

respect for him. But he had a quick and passionate temper and was very sensitive, so that, though I employed infinitely more tact with him than I had ever done with anybody else, I occasionally offended him. Then he would leave me, his face flushed, and his grey eyes dark and bright. The first time it happened I was sure we had quarrelled for ever, but immediately after school he came up to me with a shy and shamefaced smile, saying he was sorry. He did me a great deal of good : I always felt better while I was with him : and yet I knew that he thought too well of me, and that in the long run I should find his standards too high.

‘ Would you like to go to the opera to-night ? ’ he whispered to me one morning.

We were seated together on the window-sill in Doctor Gwynn’s classroom, sharing a much bescribbled *Virgil*. We always sat there, a little aloof from the rest of the class, and as the doctor was very old, blind, and rather deaf, it was possible to pass the time quite pleasantly without attracting his attention.

I had not yet been inside a theatre, and had never even thought of going to one, but the suggestion was thrilling. ‘ What opera is it ? ’ I asked.

‘ *Faust*, ’ he whispered, ‘ Gounod’s *Faust* . . . If you’ll come I’ll meet you outside the theatre at a quarter to seven. ’

‘ Very well : I’ll be there. ’

He told me more about it later, but not very much, as he had never been to an opera himself.

I went home straight from school in order to get my prep. done before tea, but the moment I entered the shop I saw that some kind of altercation was in progress between Aunt Margaret and Miss Izzy. Aunt Margaret’s ponderous black form filled up the inner doorway. Her large face, her thin, drawn-in lips, her black shining eyes and her wig, gave her a bizarre and alarming appearance, though Miss Izzy, I must say, showed no signs of alarm. She was displaying an icy dignity by stiff elbows, an erect head, and an elaborate preoccupation with the business of the shop. She seemed all collar and cuffs and freezing monosyllables. I brushed past them and went on upstairs to my dinner, leaving the parlour door open, never-

theless, so that I might hear what it was about. When the shop-bell rang Aunt Margaret's voice would cease : then, when the customer had departed, it would begin again. Twice I caught the name of Mr. Moore, a young man who travelled in the stationery line, and was, I knew, a friend of Miss Izzy's ; but the rest escaped me. Presently I heard Uncle George shuffling downstairs, and his entrance on the scene was followed by the raising of both feminine voices together.

The noise was becoming exciting, so I left my dinner and hung over the banisters. Almost immediately I had to retreat, however, for Aunt Margaret was coming upstairs, with Uncle George following her. She was now in a violent passion. ' Fool—fool—fool,' she screamed at him all along the passage. Just this one word, mingled with confused muffled remonstrances in Uncle George's voice, and followed by the banging of a door that shook the whole house. I came out into the lobby once more. Uncle George, with his back turned to me, was trying to get into the bedroom, but the door must have been locked or bolted on the inside, and through it came a shrill torrent of abuse. Uncle George's face was white and scared as he turned round and caught me staring at him. He told me to go away, but instantly followed me into the parlour, where I had sat down again to my dinner. He explained that Aunt Margaret was not well, that she had had a bad night, having been kept awake and in pain. Perhaps she had, but I could see that what he wanted was to find out if I had grasped the nature of several of those words that had been screamed at him through the closed door, and I continued to eat my dinner in stolid silence.

When I had finished I got out my books, but was too much consumed with curiosity to work properly, and as soon as the coast was clear I slipped downstairs to the shop. Miss Izzy was there alone, and pretended not to see me.

' What's the matter with Aunt Margaret ? ' I asked.

Without stopping what she was doing, Miss Izzy gave a short contemptuous laugh.

I stood reflecting. A blowsy girl, sucking a sweet, came in to buy a novelette, and when she had gone I informed Miss Izzy that I was going that night to hear *Faust*, but Miss Izzy expressed no interest in my plans.

I turned over a book of views, waiting for her to say some-

thing. They were views of Linen Hall Library and of Donegall Place, of the Cave Hill and the Albert Memorial—views of Belfast, in short, and I wondered if it would please Katherine were I to send her a complete set. Probably not. I looked at the price, written in Miss Izzy's secret code on the back, and still Miss Izzy remained dumb.

Then suddenly she said: 'When people can't control themselves they ought to be put somewhere where they'll have people to look after them who see that they do.' This slightly involved remark was addressed not to me, but to a bundle of Horner's Penny Stories, which next moment she swept defiantly into a corner.

I knew she was referring to Aunt Margaret, and looked at her expectantly. But observing my look, Miss Izzy unkindly refused to go on. I began to read aloud the names of some books advertised at the back of an art magazine, which had been ordered by a customer but not yet called for. They were evidently a series of illustrated monographs, and I suggested that she ought to stock them instead of the rubbish that *was* stocked. I had reached the fifth title—*Michelangelo*—when Miss Izzy astonished me by saying: 'That's one of Marie Corelli's.'

I dare say she had been only half listening, nevertheless I explained that Michelangelo was an Italian artist who had lived in the sixteenth century. I was about to furnish additional information when she said simply: 'Oh, don't bother me.'

She clearly was cross, and at the same time preoccupied with her own thoughts, so I changed the subject. 'Was Aunt Margaret talking about Mr. Moore?' I asked.

Miss Izzy regarded me, at first absently, and then, for no reason that I could discover, in sudden wrath, 'If you'd mind your own business,' she snapped, 'it would be a good thing for everybody. I don't know what you're doing down here at all.'

'I'm doing nothing,' I answered, crestfallen—which at least had the virtue of being true.

'People talk about girls being curious and fond of gossip,' Miss Izzy continued scornfully, 'but if other boys are like you—'

I retired upstairs without waiting for the conclusion of her speech. There I worked for an hour, and by then it was tea-time. Aunt Margaret did not appear, and we were told that she was lying down; but George, who had come home earlier than usual, wanted to know where I was going to, and, when

I told him, asked if he might come with me. I didn't like to refuse—at least not in so many words—therefore merely said that I was going with Owen.

This hint he ignored. 'Is that the chap you're so thick with? I don't suppose *he'll* object.'

He had an idea, of course, that Owen would prefer his company to mine, and as I knew that Owen wouldn't, I made no attempt to dissillusion him.

I introduced them to each other outside the theatre. We had arrived too soon—even for the early door, for which you paid sixpence extra. Owen and I began to talk, but our conversation quickly bored George, who in the midst of it introduced a characteristically Georgian remark, at which I laughed, though I tried not to. Owen, who did not always see a joke, and would have hated the best joke in the world of the particular kind George usually made, instantly relapsed into silence. He looked at George for a moment; then took a copy of the Golden Treasury translation of Plato's *Republic* from his pocket and began to read. I had known well enough that something of the sort was sure to happen, and had even warned George to be careful. Now he nudged me with his elbow and closed his left eye. I thought myself that Owen's disapproval was a little ill-timed. Especially as it hadn't the least effect, George continuing to chatter away in the best of spirits.

Two long queues by now stretched from the pit and gallery entrances. Presently the doors were opened, and slowly we squeezed our way in. The stalls were still nearly empty, but the pit was soon crowded, and I gazed round me with the liveliest interest. In another quarter of an hour the stalls too began to fill up.

The fireproof curtain was lowered and raised—just to show that it worked, George informed me; the orchestra straggled in and began to tune their fiddles. Then, after a due pause, the conductor followed, a fat little German with a bald domed head which glimmered palely, like an ostrich's egg. He faced the audience, bowed two or three times to their applause, and finally, turning round, tapped the music-stand sharply with his baton. He raised both hands, and the first phrase was drawn out slowly on the strings.

Somehow it was a wonderful moment—all that was to come

being still so excitingly uncertain. With the end of the overture the lights were lowered, and the curtain rose on the lonely Faust, seated in his study at a table, upon which were a skull, an hour-glass, and a large open book. He looked, I thought, more like a magician than a philosopher, but I was too enthralled to be critical. I had already forgotten Owen, George, and everything but what I saw before me. I was surprised to find that this old grey-bearded man, who resembled in the distance an Albert Dürer print, had a fresh strong tenor voice. Outside his window, and invisible to us, some peasants were singing as they passed. Faust heard them also, and their chant seemed to fill him with despair. Suddenly, in a light of red flame, Mephistopheles appeared. Faust pleaded passionately for his lost youth, and Mephistopheles offered to restore it—at a price. Then, miraculously, the wall of the room dissolved like a mist, and a magic vision of Margaret, seated at her spinning-wheel took shape before us, while the swinging sensual phrase of temptation, repeated again and again in the orchestra, lulled me to a dreamy languor.

"Heavenly vision !"

"Shall she love thee ? Shall she love thee ?"

Yes—evidently—for Faust, as the stage momentarily darkened, was transformed into a young man, and a triumphant duet between man and devil, invoking the joys of the flesh, brought the act to a close.

I had become absorbed in this melodrama, this enthronement of lust disguised as love ; and though my mood was broken by the tiresome students and soldiers in the next act, in the third, in the celebrated garden scene, it was revived and intensified. The sugary sweetness of the music had a hypnotic effect upon me. For me, at least, it was quite unstaled. I had never heard it till now, had never heard anything like it ; and the rapturous sensuality of the love duet drew me into a world where everything else was forgotten. It was all new to me, but it was chiefly the marvellous voices that thrilled me. And through everything, subconsciously, as I listened and watched, I was carrying on another love-making of my own, with which Faust and Margaret had nothing to do.

f During the next two acts I followed eagerly the fortunes of the lovers, not without an ingenious wonder as to why so much

tragedy, so much remorse, should attend on what appeared to me—except for the intervention of the devil—a quite natural and straightforward courtship. For some reason, possibly the fault of the libretto, more probably because I could only catch about a third of the words, I failed to discover wherein lay the secret of the trouble, and why Faust and Margaret did not get married. I accepted the situation, however ; I accepted, I think, everything except the scene in which the dying Valentine curses his sister. That jarred on me even more than the comic relief had done, though I forgot all about it when the curtain rose on the wretched Margaret in prison. With enthusiasm I watched her reject her lover and the demon—watched her fling herself on her knees and pour out her soul in an ecstatic prayer. I saw her released from the woes of life, her body stretched on the miserable straw pallet. And with that the walls of the prison rolled back, and I had a vision of her soul being borne through the skies by angels. It is true that those white-clad, flaxen-haired creatures, with glistening wings and golden crowns, bore a somewhat unfortunate resemblance to several of the livelier young females I had seen mingling with the soldiers and students at an earlier stage in the drama, nevertheless, I beheld them, in this pause in their upward flight with respect, if not exactly veneration.

‘I doubt they’re as near heaven as they’ll ever be,’ whispered George cynically, pulling his cap from his jacket pocket.

And out in the street, as we walked home, I had to submit to a deluge of destructive criticism from both my companions. I don’t know which I liked least—the scorn of Owen, who revealed the tangible source of Margaret’s troubles, and would have had it adopted by the State—or, after Owen had left us, the ribald jibes of George, who found Faust a poor creature, requiring a moon, a garden, a casket of jewels, a devil, and several incantations, before he could seduce a country girl who was already in love with him. I resolved that I would go to the opera every night that week, but that I would go alone. Between the acts I had eagerly studied my programme, and the unfamiliar, romantic names—*Tannhäuser*, *Aida*, *Lohengrin*, *Rigoletto*—were like sirens singing to me through the darkness with an irresistible and passionate sweetness.

Chapter 25

I WENT to three more operas that week—listening to them from the gallery, which, if not so pleasant, was less expensive. Then the company departed, and life resumed its normal aspect.

It was on a Monday evening, and I was struggling with a Latin prose upstairs in my bedroom, when Alice entered, waving an envelope, and crying: 'Look what the postman's brought you!' I looked, and found inside the envelope a card to say that Miss L. Gill and Master E. Gill would be at home on Friday the 19th of December. My name was written at the top of the card: in the bottom left-hand corner was the word 'Dancing,' followed by the numerals 8-12; and in the opposite corner were four letters: 'R.S.V.P.'

I had never received an invitation to a party before, and I confess that the chief feeling aroused in me by this one was a sense of alarm and consternation. I stared at the 'R.S.V.P.'—which for some reason struck me as urgent, while at the same time presenting an insoluble problem. In the end I went down to the parlour to consult the others.

Neither Uncle George nor Aunt Margaret could help me; at least their suggestions were not of the kind I wanted. Miss Izzy probably would know what should be done, but Miss Izzy had gone and would not be back till to-morrow morning, whereas I somehow felt that an answer ought to be sent to-night. On the other hand it was important that it should be couched in the correct terms—an acceptance—for though I didn't at all wish to go, and was indeed scared at the mere thought of going, it never for a moment occurred to me that I could refuse.

'Who are they?' Uncle George asked, though he must have heard me mention Owen scores of times. But this apparently was different, introduced a fresh element, brought the whole family, as it were, on to the carpet.

'Mr. Gill is a solicitor,' was all I was able to tell him, for it was all I knew.

Uncle George examined the card again, holding it out at

arm's length to do so. Then he put on his glasses and peered at it through them. 'Miss L. Gill and Master E. Gill,' he read aloud, slowly and solemnly.

'They're Owen's young sister and brother,' I explained, with suppressed irritation. It seemed to me that everybody was being extremely stupid.

'R.S.V.P.,' Uncle George murmured. He turned the card round and examined the back.

'Reply soon : very pressing,' the younger George suggested, and his father actually glanced at the calendar. 'It can't be so pressing,' he said, 'when it's nearly a fortnight off.'

'You see they have to make sure he's coming before they ask anybody else,' George went on, with a wink at me.

'That's it, da, right enough : you can leave the card by.'

But Uncle George had grasped that these were jests, and smiled. Then he looked at me over his spectacles and said he didn't see why I couldn't just thank them and say I'd be very glad to go.

He could have given me no better advice of course, only I hadn't the sense to see it. On the contrary, I had a snobbish fear of breaking some convention, and Uncle George's simplicity merely made me feel impatient.

I did nothing more that night, but in the morning, before school, I approached Miss Izzy with my invitation ; though when I saw her study it almost as closely as the others had done my faith in her, too, was shaken.

'You'll have to answer on a card,' Miss Izzy decided suddenly, having at any rate settled the first point. And she waved away the sheet of notepaper I held in my hand.

'I haven't got one,' I replied.

Miss Izzy wondered. 'There's a box of them in the shop somewhere : two or three boxes. They've been there since the dear knows when. Nobody ever asks for cards.' She hunted about, and at length succeeded in finding them in a drawer under the counter. Without breaking the pink paper band that held them together, she carefully extracted one from the bundle. I took it, and dipped my pen in the ink.

'Oh, just answer in the usual way,' Miss Izzy observed off-handedly, seeing that I still hesitated.

'But I don't know the usual way,' I told her.

Miss Izzy paused to shake out a paper lamp-shade.—Then she attended to a small boy who had come in to buy a *Deadwood Dick* tale.

'What is the usual way,' I questioned, concealing my annoyance. 'Please tell me.'

'Mr. Peter Waring,' Miss Izzy dictated rather loftily and I wrote 'Mr. Peter Waring.'

Miss Izzy glanced over my shoulder. 'You've begun too high up,' she said reassuringly. Then, as I made a movement to tear up the card : 'Oh, I dare say it'll do.'

'Mr. Peter Waring,' she pursued, 'begs to thank Miss L. and Master E. Gill for their very kind invitation——'

The shop-bell rang once more. It was the same small boy back again. He now wanted to change his story for another he had discovered in the window, and it took Miss Izzy hours fishing this out and then rearranging things.

'Yes ?' I said, trying not to appear impatient.

Miss Izzy returned to my affairs. 'What have you got ?' she asked.

I read aloud :

'Mr. Peter Waring begs to thank Miss L. Gill and Master E. Gill for their very kind invitation——'

'Invitation . . . ' Miss Izzy took up, 'and will be most pleased to accept same for the date mentioned.'

'Yes ?'

'That's all, stupid ! Don't be signing your name.'

'I wasn't going to,' I retorted indignantly.

Then I read over what I had written and thanked Miss Izzy, but I wasn't satisfied. I felt sure it wasn't right. It somehow didn't sound right. It sounded far too like Miss Izzy's own commercial correspondence—particularly the "accept same," and 'date mentioned.' I put it in an envelope, however, and addressed it : at the same time making a mental note to ask Mrs. Carroll when I got home.

Chapter 26

AFTER posting my acceptance, my next worry was about what clothes I ought to wear. I thought of consulting Owen, but consulted Mrs. Carroll instead—with the result that three days later I was consulting the tailors she had told me to go to. I was very pleased—also excited—though I don't think these feelings were even remotely connected with vanity. But now for the first time I was free to follow my own taste. I took, and expect I gave, a good deal of trouble to get what I wanted : but then I knew very definitely what I wanted. The cloth I chose was black and soft and fine ; each garment had to be fitted on till I could discover no fault in it ; the broad braid down the sides of my trousers was there because I thought it decorative. All these preliminaries, indeed, were so enjoyable that they very nearly reconciled me to the party itself.

I had been asked for eight o'clock, and at half-past six I began to dress. When I had finished, I looked at myself critically in the inadequate glass, besides which I had set two or three candles in pools of their own grease. It seemed to me that the peculiar, sullen expression of my face, caused by the formation of my forehead and the shape of my mouth, must always alienate sympathy. If I could recognize it myself, surely it must be a great deal more apparent to other people. It disappeared when I smiled, but as soon as I stopped smiling it came back again, and I couldn't go about with a perpetual grin.

I went downstairs and strutted before Miss Izzy and Alice that they might admire my fine feathers, and it was only when I reached the Gills' that every other feeling became lost in an intense shyness.

The whole house was brilliantly lit up, and I was shown to a room already filled with boys, who were removing their overcoats, putting on their dancing shoes, talking and laughing quite easily, just as if the most frightful ordeal were not staring them in the face. Evidently they all knew one another, whereas I knew nobody. Owen came up, indeed, and spoke to me, but forsook me almost immediately, for fresh people were arriving

every minute, and several of them, I noticed, looked quite grown-up. I wished Owen would come back, and when I saw a boy I knew slightly and disliked, I was ready to welcome him as the dearest of friends. He, however, not sharing my derelict position, merely nodded distantly and passed on, leaving me standing by myself, uncertain what I ought to do next. I felt that I was very much in the way in the crowded room, yet I could not summon up courage to leave it. I now bitterly regretted having been such a fool as to come at all. Several more boys arrived with whom I had a casual acquaintance at school, but beyond nodding they paid no attention to me, and I became filled with rage against them and against Owen. Then I heard a voice saying over my shoulder : ' If you're ready you may as well come on upstairs.'

It was Owen, and I followed him obediently. I passed a group of boys loitering outside an open door, and found myself all at once in a large room. The light at first half dazzled me. With a heart rapidly beating I was led up to a tall lady in black, who was standing near the fireplace. This was Owen's mother. I shook hands with her, and with his father, and with one of his elder sisters. But when that was accomplished I was again in the distressing position of not knowing what to do, and being afraid to move. Owen had once more deserted me. All about me was a crowd of brightly dressed girls, chattering and laughing among themselves, and pretending not to look at me. The boys, with whom I would have liked now to be back again, were hovering near the door, and I tried to screw up my courage to the point of crossing the room. Then somebody—I think it was Owen's sister—gave me a programme. I stood clasping it tightly in my hot hand. It seemed to me unthinkably idiotic that I should voluntarily have placed myself in this position, when all I had had to do was to refuse the invitation and stay at home.

At that moment a lady to whom I had not been introduced spoke to me. She had a pleasant smile, a voice soft and attractive, and she asked me my name and told me I must get some partners. Many of the boys, I noticed, had begun to ask for dances, and were scribbling down names in their programmes. My new friend bore me off to a fair-haired, fair-skinned, demure-looking maiden in pink, and introduced me. Unfortunately, at this juncture, one of the grown-up persons,

a tall, cheerful young man, called out : ' Annie, half a mo,' and my protectress turned away, leaving me to make my own advances. I could do nothing. How could I ask this wretched girl to dance, when I had never danced in my life ! For a few agonizing seconds I stood there : then I stammered out some thing, turned on my heel, and walked away.

Before me I saw a conservatory, the door of which was open and I escaped into it, and hid myself behind some geraniums I felt miserable. It occurred to me to slip out quietly and go home, but to do so I should first have to return to the drawing room, and in that case ' Annie,' or Owen, or one of his sisters would be sure to pounce upon me. Besides, what would the McAllisters think ? The first dance had already commenced and I saw that my rejected partner had found a substitute. He happened to be a boy I knew, and I was certain that she would tell him what I had done and that the whole school would hear about it to-morrow.

In the midst of this, the lady called Annie bore down upon me, having detected my hiding-place. But she did not seem cross : on the contrary, she was laughing. She threaded a path between the plants, while I felt my face burning.

' What do you mean by running away like that from the partners I choose for you ? ' she cried. ' Elsie told me you wouldn't ask her to dance, and she says it's my fault, because I made you come when you didn't want to.'

' I can't dance,' I answered huskily.

Nevertheless, Elsie's explanation of my conduct, in spite of the fact that it increased its rudeness, brought me relief.

The ' Annie ' lady looked at me, still laughing. Then she said good-naturedly : ' Oh, don't mind ; it doesn't really matter. Come and dance with me.'

' But I can't,' I muttered. ' I've never even tried.'

' Well, come and talk to me then.'

We talked of the opera, and when she told me she preferred *Faust* to *Adi'a* I ventured to disagree. All the same, I liked her. She laughed in a nice way, and seemed amused by nearly every thing I said. Besides, she had been jolly decent. I pulled up my trousers a little so that my silk socks might be more visible. I glanced round the room and decided that I was better dressed than most of the boys there—in fact rather like Gerald—which

helped to increase my confidence. I would have liked to ask 'Annie' what she thought of me from this point of view, but instead she inquired if I was fond of reading, and when I said Yes, asked me if I had read *Tom Brown's Schooldays*. Again I said Yes, and asked her if she had read *Anna Karénine*.

'What an extraordinary book for you to get hold of!' she exclaimed. 'I'd have thought *King Solomon's Mines* or *Treasure Island* would be much more in your line. Adventure stories are what my brothers like . . . That's one of my brothers there,' she went on, 'the fat ugly boy with magenta hair, dancing with the little girl in white.'

I inspected the brother, but he wasn't really ugly. '*Anna Karénine* is a fine book,' I said. 'Why didn't she ask for the divorce at once, do you think? I mean as soon as she went to live with Wronsky.'

Out of the tail of my eye I saw the young man who had before interfered between us again approaching. She saw him too, and immediately called out: 'Bertie, we're discussing *Anna Karénine*! I'm sure you haven't read it.'

'I say!—rather highbrow!' Bertie ejaculated, with a rapid glance at me.

We didn't really discuss it, however, for she changed the subject directly afterwards, without having even answered my question; and Bertie—who, as I heard later, was a football player of great renown—asked me if my school was going to win the cup this year.

I didn't know, but we talked for a bit about football. Then 'Annie' insisted on my dancing the Lancers with her. It wasn't real dancing—just moving about—and so far as I could judge I shuffled through all right. After this she left me to my own resources and I returned to Bertie.

There was something between Bertie and her I believed. I was sure he had only come because she had told him she was going to be there to help to look after things. Bertie had danced all the dances up till this one, he told me, adding that if he didn't have a smoke soon he'd die. He invited me to come with him to the billiard-room, and there we played a hundred up, Bertie going two to my one: but I beat him fairly easily, for I had often knocked the balls about on the table at Derryaghy. Bertie said I'd make a good player if I practised, and he showed me some

trick shots. He was very jolly, very easy to get on with, and I liked him. Presently he asked me if I didn't want any supper, and we went downstairs. Refreshments had been going all evening, I expect, but the room happened to be nearly empty when we entered it. There was a great deal of lemonade and stuff, which Bertie ignored. He evidently knew exactly where to look for what he wanted, for he immediately found and opened a bottle of champagne and by the time I had drunk two glasses I began to feel extremely comfortable. Bertie's jokes seemed now twice as good as before, and my own conversation suddenly acquired a brilliancy that made me want to talk as much as possible. After my third glass Bertie, who for some reason had become convulsed with suppressed laughter, yet at the same time looked slightly apprehensive, suggested that I should try an Apollinaris. I refused. The room meanwhile had filled up with people, though somehow I hadn't noticed them arriving. Bertie told me to keep quiet, but just then he was called away, and I was left to finish my supper alone.

Chapter 27

WHEN I rose to my feet to go back to the dancing-room I was surprised to find everything rocking gently before me, but I held on to the back of a chair till I had steadied myself. I felt now as bold as a lion, and the moment I clapped eyes on the golden-haired Elsie upstairs, I determined to apologize. I went straight to where she sat and, planting myself directly in front of her, asked her to give me the next dance.

She glanced up rather timidly, and said she was engaged already, showing me her programme. I at once stroked the name out. 'Now,' I said, 'let's go and sit down somewhere where he won't be able to find us.'

She hesitated, though not for very long. Then she rose and put her hand lightly on my arm.

'Don't you think it's awfully hot in here?' I went on. 'Besides, we have to hide.'

Out in the lobby, however, and all the way down to the hall,

there were crowds of people. This would never do, and I glanced at the staircase before us, which seemed to lead up into dim regions of coolness and solitude. I proposed that we should ascend to the next floor.

1 We found indeed a kind of upholstered wooden bench there, but Elsie looked at it in the semi-darkness with misgiving. 'I don't think we ought to have come up so high,' she said. 'I'm sure we're not meant to. I think we'd better go down : nobody else is coming up here.'

'But isn't that just why it's a good place,' I answered. 'If other people come we won't be the only ones ; and if they don't, who's to know anything about us.'

I can hardly imagine that Elsie was convinced by this sophistry nevertheless she sat down. 'I want to apologize to you,' I began softly. 'Are you offended with me ?

2 I was astonished to find how easy it was to talk and behave like this ; in fact I had a pleasing feeling of not caring a straw either what I did or what I said. And apparently it was the right method. Elsie clearly was impressed by my transformation, though on the other hand she seemed slightly puzzled by it.

'No,' she answered simply. 'I knew you were shy.' She lifted her eyes to mine, and I realised—with some intensity—that she was extremely pretty. At any rate she looked very soft, demure, and feminine in her fleecy pink dress, and with her hands folded in her lap.

3 'Do you think I'm shy now ?' I asked her.

'No,' she replied at once.

I couldn't help laughing. At the same time I felt still more attracted to her, and it seemed essential that I should put this feeling into words.

'You've forgiven me, then ?' I went on.

She looked down. 'What nonsense you talk ! As if it mattered !'

'It matters to me,' I told her, though actually I'm afraid it didn't. 'Say you forgive me.'

4 'I won't. There's nothing to forgive.' She coloured, and moved a little away from me.

'Say it,' I persisted, bending towards her. 'If you don't, I think you dislike me.'

She kept her eyes downcast and I drew closer still.

'Well ?'

'I don't dislike you,' she whispered.

I kissed her. Her colour deepened and she half averted her face, but did not move away. The swinging melody of a waltz rose up to us through the dim cool dusk.

'You're not angry, are you ?'

She shook her head. I put my arms round her, and, as I felt her yielding, I had a strong, strange pleasure. I held her close to me, kissing her again and again, while she shut her eyes like a cat that is being stroked. For a moment I felt her lips touch mine, then she struggled free, and without looking back hurried downstairs.

I followed, but before I could rejoin her Owen caught me by the arm. 'I've been hunting for you everywhere,' he began. 'I've hardly seen you all evening. Where have you been ?'

'Nowhere,' I answered.

He looked at me with a vaguely perplexed expression, but I said nothing.

'What the matter ?' he went on, gazing at me more closely.

'There isn't anything the matter,' I laughed. 'At least I hope not. I was in the billiard-room for a while, playing a game with Bertie. I suppose that's why you couldn't find me.'

He frowned, hesitated, and then said : 'Come on upstairs to my room, I'm sick of all this, and I expect it'll be going on for at least another hour.'

Chapter 28

'I HOPE you haven't been awfully bored,' was Owen's first remark after he had turned up the gas and invited me to sit down.

'No : I think it's a lovely party.'

A silence followed this, during which he glanced at me more than once, in a questioning, half-incredulous fashion.

'What *is* the matter, Peter ?' he asked again.

'Nothing, Owen—except perhaps a little natural excitement. Don't be so suspicious.'

'But you're not—not quite like yourself,' He still looked doubtful, and even worried. Then he gave it up, or at any rate changed the subject. 'Do you know the part of the book that I really like best? It's where Levine and the peasants know the meadows.'

I knew we were back again with *Anna Karénine*, but I wasn't in the mood for talking about books. I felt strangely restless; and disquieting thoughts of Elsie hovered at the back of my mind.

'That's the real kind of life,' Owen pursued, 'where all is simple and natural. I hate towns. When I'm grown up I'll live in the country if I can possibly manage it.'

'It doesn't suit everybody,' I said. 'Especially people who have to earn their living. Unless you've enough money to make you independent you've got to live where your job is; and what jobs are there in the country except for farmers, doctors, and parsons?'

'It doesn't suit people like Anna and Wronsky,' Owen replied, ignoring the latter part of my speech.

I shrugged my shoulders. 'You're always down on poor Anna.'

'She's not poor. She had every chance to be happy. Why couldn't she have been content to be *friends* with Wronsky? All the rest was selfishness

'You don't understand,' I answered.

'Don't understand what?' Owen demanded. I knew he hated to be told he didn't understand, but in this case I felt it was true.

'The kind of love Anna and Wronsky had for each other.'

'How do you know I don't? Anyway *she*, as soon as she goes to live with Wronsky, begins to talk about her love for her son. That's what's so feeble. It didn't lead her to do anything for him. She deliberately spoiled the lives of both her husband and her son for the sake of her own pleasure . . . Tolstoy thinks so, too,' he added. 'At least, I'm pretty sure he does.'

'She didn't spoil her son's life,' I said. 'He was only a little boy.'

'But she forsook him,' Owen persisted. 'And people can't remain little boys for ever.'

'You don't understand,' I repeated, and then added hastily: 'I mean, everybody isn't made in the same way. She was in love with Wronsky.'

He looked at me rather coldly. 'Do you want to stick up for that kind of thing?'

'I'm not sticking up for it; but I don't think it's the kind of thing you can accept or refuse—just as if it were an invitation to tea . . . It either happens, or it doesn't happen. There's no choice about it. Besides, it's silly to say that they might have been content to be friends.'

'I suppose, then, you like the way she makes fun of her husband to her lover!' Owen caught me up scornfully.

'What has that got to do with it?'

'It has to do with *her*—and that's what we're talking about—her character. Even when she's making her confession she's thinking chiefly of herself. She tells Karénine that she hates him, and it doesn't occur to her that *he* can have any feelings—simply because his manner is reserved and he has a habit of cracking his finger-joints.'

'Do you mean she should have gone on deceiving him?' I asked.

'I mean she needn't have been brutal . . . And all the lies!'

'I know. You find fault with her for telling the truth, and you find fault with her for telling lies. She didn't *want* to do either.'

But Owen wouldn't listen. 'She wanted what made the lies necessary,' he said. 'She deliberately kept on seeing Wronsky after her husband had warned her. I don't think there can be any excuse for that. It's all right talking about being tempted, but if you deliberately go into temptation—knowing beforehand that it's temptation—I think it's pretty rotten—especially when the happiness of other people is concerned. You admire her because she's in love with Wronsky, but there's nothing very wonderful in love of that kind.'

'I never said I admired her: I said I liked her and could understand her. If she sacrificed her husband, she sacrificed herself too.'

'Yes—and her lover—and her friend Kitty—and her son. You might just as well say that Levine's brother sacrificed himself when he drank himself to death; and Yavchine when he gambled away his fortune.'

'You don't see any difference?'

'Is there much? I certainly don't see anything fine in the

kind of love Anna feels—or at least in the way she acts. And when she says she won't have any more children it becomes disgusting. Have you thought what it means ?'

'Oh, I know what it means,' I answered.

Owen had by this time managed to change my mood completely ; but he hadn't improved it. I felt discontented and unhappy—exasperated too, because he seemed now as always, to be judging what was a matter of emotion by a purely intellectual standard. 'If you had ever loved anybody,' I went on, 'it would make you see it all differently.'

'But not more clearly, perhaps,' he retorted.

'Perhaps not. Only before you can condemn people, you must first understand human nature.'

'Understand ! You're always harping on understanding ! Why should I think *you* understand !'

'Because I've felt what we're talking about, and you haven't,' I suddenly burst out. 'You don't know what it is to care for a person so that nothing else in the world matters ; so that it's like a kind of sickness, preventing you even from sleeping. You know nothing about it—you've never felt it—yet you bring out wretched little moral precepts and deliver judgment.'

Well, I had said it—and Owen looked at me in amazement, which was perhaps scarcely surprising. But as suddenly as it had arisen my excitement passed, and I felt only a passion of homesickness, loneliness, and longing. It swept over me, like a heavy resistless tide. I wanted to get away from everything that could even remind me of my life of the past few months I seemed to have a sudden illumination in which I saw myself clearly. In those few months I had deteriorated ; the quality of my love for Katherine had deteriorated ; it had become less of the spirit, more of an obsession, and I had spoiled it by mixing it with sensual imaginations and desires. And now, as I sat beside Owen, I seemed to hear the soft breaking of waves, I had a vision of Derryaghy, and I wished I was back there—wandering in the woods or sitting in my own room—where I had once been happy and at peace—with the unending voice of the sea ever in my ears. I got up and said good-night hurriedly. I told Owen I was sorry for speaking as I had done, but that I would explain it all to him some other time ; only now I must go. I ran downstairs to get my coat and shoes,

and a few minutes later left the house, without even having said good-night to Mrs. Gill.

When I reached home I let myself in quietly with a latch-key, but while I was undressing George wakened up and began to ask about the party. I did not feel that I could go to sleep—I was too gloomy and tired and depressed—and after I was in bed we lay talking. Presently George got up and lit the gas, which I had turned out. I saw him go to the hiding-place he had shown me on the night of my arrival, and again take from it that mysterious bundle of photographs. He came over and sat down on my bed.

‘I don’t want to see them,’ I said ; but he may have detected a note of weakness in my voice, for he only laughed.

His hour had come, I suppose, and he was quick to recognize it. He drew the photographs from the envelope and showed them to me, one by one, while the gas flamed and flared above our heads.

I tried to push him away, but he bent closer. Then : ‘Don’t be a fool,’ he said suddenly, in a low thick voice. ‘I’m not going to do you any harm.’

Chapter 29

OWEN stepped back off the foot-board on to the platform. ‘Good-bye,’ I said, leaning out of the window. ‘There’s no use your waiting till the train starts. I hope you’ll have decent holidays.’

He smiled. ‘I’m sure I will. I wish, all the same, you were going to stay with us. I thought of it, but I knew you’d rather go home.’

‘Yes,’ I said slowly.

His smile dimmed : he looked at me as if all at once grown doubtful. ‘Wouldn’t you ? Don’t you want to go home ?’

‘Yes, of course.’

‘I don’t know. You don’t seem—’

He still waited, but I had taken my seat.

‘Well, I’ll see you again in a fortnight,’ he went on, recovering

his cheerfulness. 'Write to me if you aren't too busy.'

'I will.'

Another pause followed, while Owen gazed up and down the platform. He looked to me extraordinarily happy, and I wondered if I had ever been as happy as that.

'Well, good-bye again,' he said.

'Good-bye.'

And this time the guard's whistle blew, the train jolted forward with a clatter of coupling-irons, and then glided steadily on. I waved my hand to Owen, catching a last glimpse of his face before I settled down to the indifferent contemplation of my fellow-passengers.

I felt no excitement, no eagerness. True, I wanted to go home; yet not even the thought of being with Mrs. Carroll again had the power to awaken the joy I had anticipated, though she had written to ask me to spend part of my holidays with her, and I tried to think of some scheme by which to make this part as large as possible.

It would be quiet at Derryaghy. Neither Katherine nor Gerald would be there—Katherine has told me that a fortnight ago—and Miss Dick always spent Christmas with some friends who lived at Bournemouth. I should have Mrs. Carroll all to myself. Perhaps she would allow me to ask Owen down for a day or two—though I had not thought of asking him until now . . .

And at least, I told myself, I should be free from the McAllisters—from that odious house and street—from Aunt Margaret and George.

Only could you get free from people just so easily as that? Did not something always remain—pleasant or unpleasant—beneficial or harmful—good or evil? It depended, I supposed, on the depth of the impression produced. And it was always more difficult to forget what you wanted to forget: dreams were a proof of this . . .

I looked at the passengers facing me—a man, a woman, and two children. I looked out of the window; I turned the pages of *Punch's Almanac*, which Owen had bought for me at the bookstall. Then I shut my eyes and tried not to think . . .

When the train drew in at the station I saw my father standing on the platform. Somehow I had not expected him to be there, and was not ready for him. I opened the door.

While we shook hands I realized how much easier it is to make plans than to carry them out, and hoped Mrs. Carroll herself had spoken to him about my going to Derryaghy. His careworn anxious face was lit up by a smile when he asked me how I was. A porter secured my baggage, and wheeled it on a truck along the platform. But as we walked behind him, that old stupid feeling of constraint had already begun to take possession of me, and, though I tried hard to be genial and cheerful, my replies to my father's questions sounded perfunctory and uncommunicative.

It was after one o'clock when we reached the house. Remus rushed to greet me, and before his welcomes had subsided dinner was brought in. We sat down at the table and my father said : ' Will you ask a blessing ? '

This was new, but I complied. I wondered, nevertheless, why he had not asked it himself, as usual, and if it was to be henceforth one of my duties. I supposed he had some reason—probably the same as that which made him insist on my going to church and reading aloud at worship. In earlier days I had even been taken to an occasional prayer meeting. I tried to manufacture conversation, for we had rather exhausted our topics on the way from the station. ' The train must have been late,' I said brightly ; and then could think of nothing further.

It struck me that my father was older and dimmer and shabbier than I had remembered him. He presented, somehow, a picture of accepted failure, and I found myself looking out for all his old habits—the peculiar noise he made with his nose, his fashion of smacking his lips. I noticed that his nails were dirty, and that his coat looked as if he had brushed his hair over it. These things struck me all the more, perhaps, because I tried to convince myself that they were superficial. So they were, no doubt—but what difference did that make ? None, I'm afraid, in my reaction to them. I had a vision of the lonely meal he must have sat down to during the past four months, and I felt vaguely sorry for him ; yet at the same time I could not forget that, in spite of my letters, he had forced me to stay on at Uncle George's ; and subconsciously I was already wondering how soon it would do for me to mention Derryaghy.

When dinner was over we sat for a while exchanging more, silences than remarks. Presently, glancing out of the window,

he said : ' It's nice and dry for walking : we've had a very hard frost.

It almost sounded as if he intended to come with me—a thing he seldom or never did. I waited, but he did not say anything more.

' I suppose I ought to go and see Mrs. Carroll,' I murmured, with an assumption of carelessness that did not prevent me from noting the immediate change that came into his face.

' Had you planned anything ? ' I asked hastily.

' No, no.'

' Perhaps you'd like to go for a walk ? '

' No, no. Please yourself.'

So I started off for Derryaghy, but not really with much pleasure, because I had the feeling that I had offended him. It was a pity that I should have begun in this fashion—that I could not, for once, have been cheerfully and spontaneously unselfish ; but my longing to get back to my old haunts was intense, and I yielded to it. He had not asked me to go with him : if he had asked me I should have gone . . . I told myself this at all events—though I knew well enough that he might have been waiting for the invitation to come from me.

And, after all, when I reached Derryaghy Mrs. Carroll was not there. She had left a message for me, to say that she had been obliged to go out, but that she hoped I should be able to dine with her at the usual hour.

I wandered out into the winter wood—now beautiful with the strange and delicate beauty of naked trees. I loved this place really with a kind of passion, and I was glad—just for these first few hours of coming back to it—to be alone. Dark slender branches were traced against a grey sky. The birch trees were black and silver. Only the firs and laurels and holly trees were green. I loved the woods in winter : they seemed to me to possess then a peculiar charm and grace that was hidden at other times. And the wind sighed softly through the leafless boughs, and the darting birds were black against the sky, and all was wrapped in a kind of sleeping, frozen loveliness.

The laurels and hollies were dark and coated with frost ; the dead fronds of the bracken had turned brown. But in places this sombre colouring was splashed with the crimson

leaves of birch-blossoms. There was a hint of approaching snow in the air—there was almost a silence of snow—and I seemed to feel it drawing closer to me out of the sky.

The ground was hard as iron. Here and there a single leaf forlorn and faded, trembled still at the end of a twig, but nearly all the leaves that were going to fall had fallen weeks ago. Sleep, not death, bound this quiet silvan world. I saw the flash of fur, brown and white, through the frozen grass and undergrowth; but Remus, trotting soberly at my heels, was on friendly terms with rabbits and all smaller creatures. Occasionally he chased a bird, but merely as a kind of game, never with the idea that birds could possibly be caught. And beneath everything—creating the mood upon which all this beauty was at least in some measure dependent—I had a vision of long fire-lit, lamp-lit evenings—with books, and drawings, and Mrs. Carroll.

It was dusk when I returned. A servant preceded me into the drawing-room and lit the lamps and made up the fire. I sat down in one of the big arm-chairs and began to turn over Christmas Numbers—*The Graphic*, *The Illustrated London News*, *Holly Leaves*—looking at the pictures. I began to read a story by Bret Harte. It was very pleasant to be back here again, and I tried to forget the past few months, and to think only of what was here and now. This old house—how I loved it! The cheerful wood fire, the roomy depth of my arm-chair, the soft thick carpet, all the surroundings of peacefulness and homeliness and comfort, appealed to me more perhaps than they had ever done before, because of my experience of Cromac Street and the McAllisters. The fragrant China tea that was brought in to me tasted better than anything I had ever tasted, and when I had finished my story—*The Châtelaine of Burnt Ridge*—and the tea things had been cleared away, I sat on dreaming . . .

As I looked into the fire I knew that I ought to have gone home on this, the evening of my arrival, but six o'clock, our tea hour, had struck ten minutes ago, and still I did not stir. Maybe I would have gone had I got felt a recurrent, smouldering bitterness against my father. I felt it was to him that I owed the dark period through which I had passed—to his obstinacy, his refusal to listen, his refusal to see. Curious thoughts—

thoughts I should have been ashamed to tell anybody—came to me now for the first time. It made a tremendous difference just who happened to be one's father, I thought ; and I remembered that the Dales were Mrs. Carroll's nearest relations. 'She likes me better than anybody else,' I said to myself. 'If I were alone in the world, if I had no father, she would adopt me . . . All this—the house—everything—will belong one day to somebody else. But to whom . . . ?' And I remembered that she did not care for Gerald, and that Gerald did not in the least try to make her care for him. Probably he had only come over last summer because his people had insisted on it . . .

All at once I realized that these speculations were detestable—or would have been if they had possessed any relation to my actual feelings. But did they ? At least, if I loved the house, I loved Mrs. Carroll a great deal more. At the same moment I heard the clear ringing of iron hoofs on the frozen ground, mingled with the crunching of gravel under carriage wheels. I knew that she had returned.

I ran out to meet her, but she pushed me on into the room before her. She was wrapped in furs, and when she lifted her thick veil her face was ruddy and smiling. 'You've grown so big,' she said, 'that I don't know whether you want to be kissed or not, but I hope you do.' She kissed me, and then held me at arm's length to look at me. She moved me a little so that the lamplight fell on my face. 'Good gracious, child !' she cried with sudden anxiety : 'you're not looking well at all ! Don't they feed you properly ? I'm sure you're thinner. And how did you get those black lines under your eyes ? You can't be getting enough sleep—or else it's the town air . . . Have you been working too hard ?'

'No,' I answered, 'but I was up late last night.'

'Late ! How late ? What were you doing ? You must take proper care of yourself. Your health is a great deal more important than any wretched examination . . . Well, at all events, I'm very glad to have you back again.'

After dinner, when we were sitting by the fire, she once more took up the subject of my appearance, which evidently did not satisfy her. 'You've altered,' she said. 'It isn't only that you've grown, but you somehow look older. Do you get your

meals properly ? I expect you stop to play games after school instead of going home to your dinner.'

I assured her that I got my meals, and changed the subject as soon as I could by inquiring after Katherine and Gerald. 'Will they be coming over next summer ?' I asked.

'I don't know about Gerald,' Mrs. Carroll said, 'but Katherine will, I'm sure . . . As I told you in my letter, I invited her for Christmas, but she couldn't come.'

'Yes : she told me too.'

I inquired after various other people, for I wanted to know everything that had happened since I had gone away. Then I sat quiet for a while, and had just decided that perhaps I ought to be going home, when Mrs. Carroll said : 'I wish you would tell me, Peter, what is it that is worrying you.'

'But there's nothing,' I answered, smiling. 'As a matter of fact, I've been thinking all evening how nice it is to be back here again.'

She did not press me further, though I could see she was only half convinced. 'Remember you're to come to stay for a few days before the end of your holidays. You must stay at least a week. When does your term begin ?'

'On the eighth,' I replied.

'And those people you're with—the What-do-you-call-'ems—how do you like them ?'

'The McAllisters ?' I paused, hesitating. 'Not very much.'

'I guessed you didn't, and you might just as well have told me so plainly.' Then she added : 'I think I'll come to see you there, I wanted to go before, only your father was so determined that I shouldn't. He seemed to think it would unsettle you.'

'I'd rather you didn't,' I murmured uncomfortably.

'Why ?'

I could not tell her why. It was simply that I felt the whole place—as well as the people—would impress her disagreeably, and I did not wish to do this. It could change nothing, so what was the use of troubling her. Therefore I kept silent, and she went on : 'I must call and have another talk with him before you go back.'

'It won't do any good,' I told her. 'He's made up his mind about it, and he'll only get annoyed. You see, Aunt Margaret, is his sister.'

But this reason did not satisfy Mrs. Carroll. 'Even if she is—you'd rather be somewhere else, wouldn't you?'

'He won't let me leave,' I said. 'I've spoken to him. He has an idea about home influence. He must have told you himself.' 'Home fiddlesticks!' she returned impatiently. 'You'd have been far better at a good public school. This is neither one thing nor the other.'

'I'd rather you said nothing,' I pleaded; for I knew it would be useless, and might even end in my not being allowed to come to stay at Derryaghy next week.

'Your father is so strange!' she continued, half to herself. 'I can't make him out at all. He seems——'

'Not to trust me?' I suggested. 'It is that.'

Mrs. Carroll looked quite angry. 'But why?' she exclaimed. 'In what way doesn't he trust you?'

I stopped to consider. 'It's not that he distrusts me in the ordinary sense . . . I mean, he doesn't think I'd be dishonest or anything like that. But he thinks I'm naturally inclined to—go wrong.'

'Go wrong!' she echoed incredulously. 'Go wrong in what way?'

'To the bad,' I said.

She gazed at me for a moment in astonishment. Then: 'Nonsense!' she abruptly answered. 'I don't know what put such an idea into your head.'

'He did,' I muttered. 'And he must have some reason, I suppose . . . I believe it has to do with my mother. What's there?' I went on, since she did not contradict me. 'Do you know anything?'

Mrs. Carroll pursed up her lips before replying. 'No,' she then said. 'At least nothing more than you do yourself.'

'You've never heard anything?'

'No.'

It wasn't a matter she wished to discuss, I thought; nor did I really wish to discuss it myself: and presently she reverted to an earlier subject, holding up a magazine to shield her face from the fire. 'How do you like your school?' she asked. 'Tell me all about it—and about your friends—and what you do.'

I had already told her, but evidently not enough; so I began again, giving, as I went along, a kind of rough rambling

account of my usual day. I told her about Owen, told her he was the chief friend I had made, and described last night's party, leaving out its later developments. Yet I had a feeling that all this was not really what she wanted to know—that I was putting her off, giving her a false impression. Only how could I not do so unless I were to tell her everything, and that seemed impossible.

'It makes such a difference when you find somebody who is more or less like yourself,' she said, as I came to a pause.

'I don't think Owen's really very like me,' I answered. 'I don't think we're a bit alike, but——' I tried to puzzle it out. 'I suppose we must have some things in common.'

'I should say you had a great deal in common,' Mrs. Carroll declared.

'He's a very decent chap,' I went on lamely. Then, as this didn't in the least express my feeling: 'I mean, he's extraordinarily straight, and high principled. He's not like anyone else.'

'Surely *some* other people have high principles,' she exclaimed smiling. 'That can't be the difference.'

'No, but—— Well, for one thing, he's awfully serious. I don't mean dull—but serious about life, and religion, and duty and all that sort of thing.'

'I expect he's clever,' Mrs. Carroll said.

'Yes, but it's not so much that. In some ways he's very simple. Of course he is clever, only it's more that he has so many interests people as a rule don't have—outside interests.'

'Well, I think it's very nice for you to have such a friend, and I'm sure he is nice. What about the other one?—your cousin—George—isn't that his name? What is *he* like? Are you friends with *him*?'

'Oh, yes.'

'Tell me about George too,' she said.

'There's nothing to tell,' I prevaricated. 'He's in business. You wouldn't care for him.'

'Why not? Don't you?'

'Yes, well enough.' And it suddenly struck me as strange that this really was more or less true, that I *had* no feeling against him.

'You don't seem very enthusiastic,' Mrs. Carroll remarked, looking at me closely.

'Oh, he's all right,' I mumbled uneasily. 'I dare say he's nice enough—just as nice as I am.'

She waited a moment, and I knew something was coming. 'Why won't you tell me what is the matter, Peter?'

'There's nothing the matter,' I lied, 'I don't know what makes you think there is. It's just that I'd rather be in rooms of my own. Only I don't want you to speak about it—please. After all if I'd gone to a public school I mightn't have liked that either.'

Chapter 30

IT was a beautiful, clear, winter night when Remus and I walked home. The tide was in, and I looked over the low wall at the dark smooth sea, stretching away, almost black, except where the moonlight touched it. I trailed my hand along the wall, heedless of the biting frost. On the verge of the distant golf-links a ruddy light from the hotel shone out into the darkness.

As I turned up the Bryansford Road I saw my father standing in the moonlight by the garden gate, and behind him the house door was open. Instinctively I slackened my pace. He was looking for me perhaps: he must already have heard me; for the sound of my footsteps rang out sharply on the lonely road.

'Where have you been all this time?' he asked, as I approached.

There was a hardness in his voice that in my present mood I shrank from. 'I knew he knew where I had been, and that the question was merely a rebuke. I told him I was sorry, and tried to explain. 'I didn't intend to be so late,' I said, 'but Mrs. Carroll was out when I first called, and had left a message asking me to stay to dinner. Afterwards she wanted to hear how I had been getting on at school, and how I liked it, and all I had been doing.'

'I hope you were more communicative than you were to me,' he answered coldly. 'It was too much trouble, I suppose, to let me know you weren't coming home. As it was, I waited nearly an hour.'

'I'm sorry,' I mumbled again 'I didn't think you would wait I thought you'd understand'

I had already begun to climb the stairs on my way to bed, when he called me back

'Why are you rushing off like this, now?'

I hastily returned 'I was going to bed,' I said 'I didn't know you wanted to sit up'

I went on into the parlour, where there was a burnt-out fire in the grate—just large enough to make you realize the cold—and on the table some bread and butter, a jug of milk, and a tumbler I sat down beside the fire

'I don't want to sit up, but neither do I want you to treat your home as if it were an hotel—a place where you come merely to sleep I've no doubt things are more to your taste at Derryaghy, but while this *is* your home you must try to make the best of it'

I looked at him uncomfortably, but I said nothing I knew he had been sitting here all evening by himself, but he had always done that and if I had stayed with him he would simply have read a book There never had been any companionship between us, and there never could be now Not did I think it was my fault After all, I could pass a quite amicable evening with Uncle George

'Seeing that you only got home to-day,' my father went on, putting down my silence, I suppose, to sulkiess, 'you might at least have been content with staying out all afternoon I should have imagined Mrs Carroll would have thought so too Especially since—as I dare say she told you—she wants you to spend part of your holidays at Derryaghy I neither accepted the invitation nor refused it I left you to decide for yourself—though I had no doubts as to what you *would* decide

'Yes, she told me to-night,' I answered meekly

'Well?'

'I think I'd like to go'

There was a silence, and I wondered how long we were going to sit shivering here I also wondered why Mrs Carroll hadn't given us both up as a bad job long ago That she hadn't certainly was a tribute to her patience with him and her affection for me

'I had a letter this evening from your Aunt Margaret,' my

father resumed. 'She says you've made friends with some people called Gill, and have been to a party at their house.'

'Yes ; it was last night.'

'Why do you never tell me of these things yourself ? One would suppose I was a complete stranger to you.'

'I didn't think it would interest you,' I said. 'That was the only reason.'

It sounded a pretty poor one, I confess. There were my visits to the opera, too. Aunt Margaret apparently had not mentioned them, nor the fact that I didn't always go to church. These omissions puzzled me, especially the latter, seeing that she had made such a fuss about it at the time. It did not occur to me that behind her silence there might be a mercenary motive—that what she didn't want to risk was the possibility of my not returning to the house in Cromac Street.

Chapter 31

THE thought of that return lay like a perpetual shadow at the back of my mind, yet it was several days before I could screw up my courage to the point of mentioning it to my father. Then one morning after breakfast I did so.

'There is something I want to say to you,' I began nervously, and, though he had been about to rise from the table, he instantly adopted an attitude of attention so excessively attentive that it had the effect of striking me dumb. I forgot the careful phrases I had prepared while dressing, and could only stammer out awkwardly that I wished to leave the McAllisters and choose a lodging for myself.

The revival of the question, I saw, was not pleasing to him, and I hadn't expected it to be. 'You're very self-willed,' he said slowly and drily, and I knew that I hadn't moved him in the least.

Nevertheless I made a second attempt. 'It's not because I'm self-willed,' I said. 'It's because I don't like sleeping with George.'

It was as much as I *could* say, but he dismissed it quietly. Why ? You have your own bed, haven't you ?

‘Yes.’

‘And George is your cousin.’

‘I know he is my cousin. What difference does that make?’
But I saw that it was hopeless.

‘It’s just this sort of nonsense,’ my father exclaimed impatiently, ‘that makes me doubt the wisdom of allowing you to go to Derryaghy. It gives you a taste for luxuries, so that you turn up your nose at people who have to live in a simpler way.’

‘It isn’t a question of luxuries,’ I muttered under my breath, and the words had a kind of dreary irony.

But he was determined to see in my persistence only a caprice, or an obstinate struggle to get my own way. True, he offered a sort of conventional excuse. ‘I didn’t know when I arranged for you to live with Aunt Margaret that they wouldn’t be able to give you a room to yourself. On the other hand, I don’t consider that a sufficient reason for taking you away now you *are* there. It would amount almost to an insult. But I told you this when I wrote to you, and I can see no purpose in going over it again.’

None indeed, so I said no more.

It was Christmas Eve. During the night there had been a heavy fall of snow, and on the hard frozen ground it lay unmelted to the edge of the sea. All morning I sat beside the fire reading, but after dinner, about three o’clock, I took Remus for a walk over the golf-links. The snow was several inches deep, but crisp and dry on the surface. I had not slept well—what sleep I got being broken by bad dreams—and I determined now to go for a really long walk, so as to be sure to sleep to-night. In spite of the prospect of staying at Derryaghy, in spite of this frosty exhilarating weather, in spite of the fact that I would be getting a Christmas-box from Mrs. Carroll to-morrow, and probably letters from Katherine and Owen, my thoughts were gloomy and depressed. Never before had I looked so closely into myself, and never had I found so little there to comfort me. I felt too dejected even to be angry with my father. I knew that for months past my mind had been submitted to an influence which had acted on my imagination and senses like an unwholesome stimulant. Yet certain seeds, I supposed, could only have taken root within me, could only have sprung up so quickly, be-

cause they had found a soil apt to receive them : and I remembered my father's habitual attitude of mistrust. Had he then, all along, been justified ? I thought of the book I had been reading that morning—a book written for boys and all about boys—and I compared the characters in it with myself—compared the darkness that weighed upon me now with the troubles they had experienced. It seemed to me that I must be different from every boy in that book—from the bad just as much as from the good. I had feelings which apparently none of them felt. I wondered if I were really different, or if the book were untrue ?—but now could I ever find out unless I confided in someone, and unless I were truthfully answered ? At present I was hopelessly shut in to the little circle of my own desires and feelings. Owen, whom I knew better than any other boy—what, after all, did I know about him except what he cared to tell me ? I knew no one but myself, and of myself I knew much that filled me with shame.

My self-examination had brought me to a standstill. A deep silence overhung the earth. Behind me were the white frozen mountains ; on either side was an endless stretch of snow ; and before me was the dark and sullen sea. The day was closing in, and already more light rose from the ground than fell from the sky overhead. Snow had begun again to fall—a few flakes, drifting and fluttering down out of the grey clouds. But I knew this was the only the beginning, and that there would be more soon. I walked to the edge of the sea, and watched the cold desolate waves rolling in to break at my feet. At that moment I felt infinitely alone.

Alone spiritually, and alone as one might be in a dead or dying world. The whirling flakes of snow fell ever faster out of the winter sky ; the barren, frost-bound land was wrapped in stillness ; the only sound I heard came from the breaking waves. And it seemed to me that the darkness gradually approaching was like the final extinction of life, and I could imagine that there would be no further awakening—that the end had at last been reached.

It was Remus who aroused me from this dreaming. I had forgotten him, and he begun now to urge me to come on, with a peculiar note in his voice, as if he were less impatient than distressed and anxious. He jumped up against me, and I knelt

down in the snow, hugging him, while his warm red tongue passed rapidly over my face. I held him closely, and his black muzzle was pressed into my cheek.

Chapter 32

A DAY or two before leaving town I had sent off a small picture to Katherine as a Christmas-box. It had taken me a long while to find anything I thought she might care for, and which at the same time pleased myself. In the end I had chosen a reproduction of Francia's portrait of the boy Federigo Gonzaga—the Miserden Park picture. I had got it framed in a flat, dull, dark frame, and carefully packed : and over and over again I had imagined her opening the parcel.

Christmas Day came, however, without my hearing from her. The postman brought me *The Trial and Death of Socrates* from Owen, and a comic card from George—that was all. Then, on the day after Christmas, Katherine's letter arrived. I did not open it : I wanted to make the pleasure of anticipation last as long as possible ; so I told myself that I would not read it till bed-time. I put it in the inner pocket of my jacket, and from time to time took it out and looked at it. It was bulky ; it was a long letter ; the only long letter she had ever written to me. In the end I became so impatient that I went to bed an hour earlier than usual.

I placed the letter on my pillow and a lighted candle on a chair beside the bed. I undressed, got under the clothes, and only then, with eager fingers, tore open the envelope and drew out its contents.

I looked at them as they lay on the bright patchwork quilt—a single sheet of notepaper, and a Christmas card in booklet form—which accounted for the thickness of the package. My disappointment was so great that for a while I did not even read the few lines she had scrawled, but lay on my back and stared dismally at the iron rail at the foot of my bed. My thoughts were bitter. I recalled the many letters I had written to her, undiscouraged by brief and irregular answers. Some of my letters had been pages long ; to the one I had sent with

my present I had given a whole evening. Finally I glanced at what she had written,—about a dozen lines, thanking me for my picture, and hoping I would forgive her for not writing more ; but there were visitors in the house and she simply must look after them. She hoped I would have a happy Christmas and a happy New Year.

I blew out the candle and lay with my eyes wide open staring into the darkness. The few stock phrases were vivid in my mind, yet presently I relit the candle and read them again. I had missed nothing. It was the emptiness of her words that so sickened me. A task, a duty, to be got over as quickly as possible. If she had really wanted me to be happy she had chosen a strange way of showing it. It would not have been difficult to have made me happy, and I thought of how I had sat up far into the night to finish my Christmas letter to *her*.

I heard my father's steps on the stairs, followed by the shutting of his bedroom door. Then my glance fell on the Christmas card, and I tore it in two, and flung the pieces at the opposite wall. I was disappointed, wounded, and resentful. I pictured her enjoying herself with a houseful of her own and Gerald's friends. The irony of those Christmas wishes might almost have been intentional had the whole letter not been so perfunctory. She knew well enough how happy I must be, stuck in this wretched hole, alone with my father. I began to compose a reply to be written to-morrow, a reply expressing what I felt. I wanted to make her realize, if only for a moment, how much she had hurt me : I wanted to hurt *her*. I tossed and turned and could not go to sleep, yet in the end I must have slept more deeply than usual, for it was broad daylight when I opened my eyes.

I sprang out of bed and hurried into my clothes. My mood had not changed, and the minute breakfast and the inevitable 'worship' were over, I sat down to write my letter. I wrote it at top speed, in a fever of pent-up emotion, with the result that when I came to read it over I found I had left out so many words, and misspelt so many others, that I had to make a fresh copy. This I posted in an agony of impatience, knowing that at least three more days must elapse before I could receive an answer.

But I did receive one ; it reached me at Derryaghy ; and

Katherine seemed sorry for having hurt my feelings ; at any rate she said she was. She said it had been horrid of her to write such a wretched scrawl. She *had* been frightfully busy, but if she had known I should mind so much she would have written me a whole book. Her regret, though expressed half playfully, seemed sincere. The letter at all events was friendly, and perfectly frank in being nothing more. But I could guess that she wished I would take things less to heart, and adopt a similar tone—that I too would be friendly, cheerful, and un-exacting—when everything would be a great deal easier and more enjoyable for both of us.

Chapter 33

IF I had been reluctant in the beginning to go to the McAllisters, my return was more reluctant still, nevertheless the day arrived when I bid good-bye to my father and went back. I found no change in them, though they may have noticed a change in me, for I kept as much to myself as I could, and when with them took less trouble to try to be sociable. I was in a strangely unsettled condition—restless and inclined to take the darkest view of things. The short damp winter days—mild enough, but with never a gleam of sunshine in them—did not help me. The continual greyness, the wet muddy roads, the murky atmosphere and frequent rain—these seemed to have a far more depressing effect in town than in the country ; or it may have been that I was more susceptible just now to their influence.

For I was in a brooding discontented state of mind, and except for an occasional walk with Owen there was nothing to rouse me out of it. I wanted to get rid of a burden that was oppressing me ; I longed for sympathy and understanding ; I longed for guidance, even if I could not follow it. I was bewildered, divided in my mind ; my mind itself was a ferment of doubts, desires, resolutions, struggles and despairs. I cannot have been either to Owen or to anybody else a very cheerful companion.

There was the worldly problem ; for notwithstanding a high opinion of my own intelligence, there were periods when I saw

my life as doomed to failure and myself to disaster. There was the more urgent moral problem—the problem of sin and damnation—over which I pondered, seeing in damnation a condition of mind that attracts evil, and from which no evil can be hidden. When I was with Owen all this grew fainter and even disappeared. He may have had, in fact I knew he had, his own problems, but they were not the same as mine, and to me he seemed completely free from everything that made my life just now so difficult. That is why I could not talk to him about it, and why he must have found me unusually silent and dull : yet I had an increasing and at last intense desire to confide in somebody.

Only it must be someone who would understand. In spite of my revolt against Christianity my thoughts at times turned in that direction. Not because I felt any stirrings of religious emotion : it was not the lack of faith which troubled me : it was simply that an idea of confession hovered before me as a necessary preliminary to any counsel that could be of much use. And after all, was not the Church there for that purpose ? But the Church, in this sense, meant an individual—somebody I could trust. And having got thus far, my next step seemed plain.

Chapter 34

YET the matter was not so simple as I at first imagined. One excellent result it did have, and that was to make Sunday, hitherto the flattest day of the week, now the most absorbing, while I went from church to church seeking a possible confessor. In nearly every case I could tell at once that I had not found him, and I was on the point of giving up the idea as impracticable, when one Sunday evening chance took me to Saint Mary Magdalene's. The clergyman who conducted the service was a man well past middle-age. He looked frail and ascetic, with an expression on his worn face as if he had come through a good deal before he had emerged from the struggle victorious. At least, that was how he impressed me, though the struggle may have been merely against ill health. He preached a sermon

which, while slightly vague, appealed to my imagination. Even the weakness of his voice, and the unusual quietness of his manner, had upon me the strange effect of making what he said more real. His very dispassionateness suggested a quality of spiritual vision. He struck me as a man who had been unhappy, and therefore, if he had found peace, I thought he must, too, have found the secret of living. I returned to hear him several times, and although my first impression was not strengthened, neither was it effaced. Finally I persuaded Owen to come with me, but Owen could see nothing in him at all.

Far from shaking me in my view, this unfavourable opinion helped to confirm it. Not through perversity, but merely because I felt that the person I was in search of would not be likely to appeal to Owen. I did not want a primarily intellectual person ; I wanted one who out of his own, perhaps unorthodox, experience, would understand. That night I wrote a letter to the Rev. Henry Applin, asking if I might come to see him, and, if I might, would he tell me when.

Chapter 35

I WALKED home with Owen next day after school, intending to tell him what I had done, but somehow find it difficult to do so. Aided by a priest we passed on the road, I turned the conversation to Roman Catholicism, but when I broached the subject of confession, the very idea seemed so distasteful to him that I quickly abandoned it, without mentioning either Mr. Applin or my project. Then, coming out at the garden gate, we met Mrs. Gill, who invited me to dine with them at seven o'clock, and I supposed I ought to refuse, because Owen had told me how busy he was. I knew he was only busy over an epitome he was making of Herbert Spencer's *First Principles*, and, as I had a strong desire to stay, I felt annoyed with him.

'You'd better change your mind,' he said, after his mother had gone.

'What's the use, when you don't want me,' I replied crossly.

He laughed. 'Of course I want you. Don't be so touchy ; and come on in now.'

So I went in, and while we were having tea looked over the epitome. It represented a good deal of work, and I remembered having asked him to read Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, and that he had refused, giving as an excuse that he hadn't time. It was the same, I thought pettishly, with nearly everything I recommended, though I was always reading books to please him. He offered now to lend me Caird's *Evolution of Religion*, in two dark-blue volumes.

'I don't want it,' I answered impatiently. 'I'm sick of all that stuff. You're forever complaining about not being able to be religious, yet you're never really happy unless you're reading something against religion.'

'This isn't against it,' he replied stiffly, 'and I'm not anxious for a religion that won't bear examination.'

'No religion *will* bear it,' I said.

We walked on, solemnly serious, nor did I even see anything ingenuous or amusing in Owen's next remark: 'People who have read a hundred times more philosophy than I have manage to remain Christians.'

'You're thinking of Levine in *A. K.*,' I answered.

'I'm not.'

'And Levine doesn't remain a Christian. He drops Christianity and then takes it up again—for no particular reason in either case.'

'Why do you say he has no reason?' Owen instantly objected. 'For that matter, what do you call a reason?'

'I don't call half a dozen words spoken by an ignorant moujik one. If religion is the most valuable thing in life, as you and Tolstoy think it is, it oughtn't to be at the mercy of a chance phrase.'

'Nor is it,' Owen returned.

'“One man lives for his stomach,”’ I quoted, ‘“another for his soul, for God, in truth.” You'd find the same thing in any tract. And why should it turn you to Christianity particularly? A man who believed in Pan could live just as much for his soul as a Christian does.’

'I don't believe anybody ever *did* believe in Pan,' Owen declared bluntly. 'And because certain words happened to influence Levine, Tolstoy doesn't mean that they'll necessarily help everyone.'

'He does. Only you're nearly as bad as Levine yourself.'

Owen was not listening ; he was working out an argument. But I was beginning to be tired of Tolstoy, and his Annas and Levines, and wanted, for a change, to express my own view. 'If you were to see a ghost,' I said, 'it might make a difference. It would show that there *was* another world—deeper and finer.'

'Why deeper, and why finer?' Owen questioned at once.

'Because it would be spiritual,' I said.

He frowned. 'This world can be spiritual . . . In fact it ought to be. It depends on how you live and how you think. You and I are spiritual.'

I looked at him in surprise.

'Well, we are,' he maintained, half defiantly. 'I don't say all the time, but a good part of the time.'

'Yes—and that's just what makes the trouble,' I retorted. 'If we were completely either the one thing or the other it would be a good deal simpler.'

Owen, however, was thinking. 'Your mother is dead, isn't she?' he suddenly asked, and then stopped short in confusion. 'I'm sorry,' he stammered. 'I don't know why I said that.'

'It's all right,' I laughed. 'Why shouldn't you say it? Anyhow, she isn't dead . . . Shall we go for a walk before dinner?'

Without replying, he got up and called the dogs, and we left the house. On reaching the road, we turned to the right, and walked along it as far as Shaw's Bridge, where we branched off on to the river bank. It was already well on in April. The young unfolding leaves had spread like a delicate green flame over the black branches ; the sky was clear, and there was a sharpness in the air that made us walk quickly. The dogs, two rough-haired Irish terriers, ran along the bank, sniffing among the coarse grass and bents, eager to hunt anything, whether a rat or a stick.

Owen's reference to my mother reminded me that I had told him very little about myself, or rather about my home life. He did not know anything except that my father was a school-master and lived at Newcastle. When I had spoken to him of home, it had usually been of Mrs. Carroll and of Derryagh. Of course he knew about my Cromac Street relations, and had

met George ; but I had been purposely uncommunicative, being ashamed of the class to which I belonged ; and I was struck now by the foolishness and snobbishness of this—especially with a person like Owen, for whom such things meant nothing.

‘Why did you think my mother was dead ?’ I asked him.

‘I don’t know. I suppose because you never—— I don’t know, I’m sure.’

‘I want to tell you about her,’ I said.

Strangely enough, though I had been reluctant to mention that my father was a village schoolmaster, it did not embarrass me in the least to talk about this much more private matter. I told him all I knew, and wound up with : ‘Perhaps my father isn’t even my real father’—though why I should have thrown in this gratuitous after-touch I can’t conceive ; certainly it wasn’t because I had the least doubt of my legitimacy.

Owen listened without expressing an opinion.

‘Do you think I ought to try to find out something more ?’ I asked him.

‘You never did try ?’

‘Never really. I didn’t know how to set about it. I couldn’t very well ask my father.’

‘Why not ?’ said Owen simply.

‘Oh, I just couldn’t,’ I repeated. ‘I don’t even know whether they’re divorced or not.’

‘There must be somebody who knows,’ he said. ‘Perhaps your friend Mrs. Carroll.’

‘She doesn’t—or else she won’t tell me. I asked her last Christmas.’

I saw, however, that I was misleading him, and that he was taking all this a good deal more seriously than I took it myself. It was precisely the kind of thing he *would* take seriously—probably deciding that a question of duty was involved, and working it into the Tolstoy ethic, whereas I had chiefly been trying to make myself interesting. ‘The whole thing——’ he began, but tailed off without completing his thought. ‘It’s hard to know what you should do,’ he murmured, obviously impressed.

And it was so remote from what was really important to me, from what I had really wanted to discuss! Why should I have

talked like this ? Why couldn't I have told him plainly that for months at a time I never even remembered that I *had* a mother ? We walked on for a long while saying nothing : Owen, I suppose, thinking of my story ; I thinking of something very different. And now I was determined to tell him about Mr. Applin, though it was not till we were on our way home that I began my explanation. Then I blundered through it, not telling him the truth—hedging, prevaricating, wanting him to know yet frightened to be too explicit.

'And then you're really going to him !' he exclaimed, when I had finished.

'I'll have to go—now that I've written. That is, if he doesn't tell me not to.'

'He can hardly do that,' Owen said, and relapsed into silence.

'I didn't think at first that you meant it seriously,' he presently began again. 'It seems so queer—especially for *you*. What are you going *for* ? Just to talk to him ?'

'Yes, I suppose so.'

'But what about ?'

I hesitated. 'Well——' Then I asked : 'Do you remember what we were saying about confession ?'

'It's not that, I hope,' he caught me up quickly. 'You're not——'

'Why not ?' I said.

'But what's the matter ?' He gazed at me. 'Why should *you* ? What have you done ? And if you *have* done anything, what business is it of his ?'

We had come to a standstill on the lonely river bank. Owen's eyes were fixed upon me—disapprovingly, questioningly—but I had nothing to say, or rather I could not say it. I stood before him, looking on the ground, my hands in my trousers pockets.

Presently I raised my head, but I looked away from him and across the fields. 'Come along,' I said quietly. 'It must be getting late.'

When I reached home, at about half-past nine, Alice came running to meet me. Her white skin, her bright black eyes, her long straight black hair—brushed back from her forehead and spreading out on either side of her face in the shape of a fan

—were vivid in the gaslight, under which she stood looking up at me while I opened the letter she held out. It was from Mr. Applin, asking me to call on Wednesday evening between nine and ten ; or on Friday between the same hours if Wednesday did not suit me.

Chapter 36

SINCE the new year I had been working harder than I had ever done in my life before. The Intermediate examinations would be taking place in June, but this was not my reason : it was merely that I had discovered that on the plea of work I could shut myself up alone in the evenings, and that the work itself kept me from brooding over other things.

I was brooding over them, nevertheless, on the following Wednesday, when I got home from school ; and after I had had my dinner, I went out to brood over them again. In four and a half hours, I reflected, I should be knocking at Mr. Applin's door. What would be the result ? How did one begin a conversation of that sort ? Perhaps it happened oftener than I imagined.

At this juncture, by what I took to be an almost miraculous coincidence, I found myself approaching the open door of a Roman Catholic Church. There, I told myself, if all else failed me, was my way out. Or so it appeared for perhaps five seconds. Then I saw that it would not do. I was completely ignorant, of course, yet it *seemed* highly improbable that a person of an alien sect would be allowed to walk in, make his confession, and walk out again. Things were never so simple as all that, and even for the orthodox there probably would be preliminaries—some kind of preparation.

In spite of this, I could not resist the impulse to go inside and sit down near one of the confessionals. The name of the priest, Father Dempsey, was printed in large letters above it ; but I supposed he would only come there by appointment ; it was hardly likely that he lurked *perpetually* within that shrouded cabinet. On the other hand, he might have certain *fixed* hours when he was at home to his penitents, as a doctor is at home to his

patients—say from four till six every afternoon. With this the question arose—Was I a penitent?—and there could be little doubt as to the answer—that I much more closely resembled a patient. In fact I didn't quite know what I was. But I continued to sit on, in the faint hope of seeing somebody coming out or going in. I thought that merely by looking at such a person I might learn something—get some kind of assurance or encouragement.

This hope was not fulfilled. Three little girls, busy with their beads, temporarily suspended their devotions in order to glance at me and whisper. The only other person in the church was a middle-aged woman, who was kneeling before an altar, above which hung a large bright oleograph of the Madonna and Child. This woman's lips never ceased to move, and her eyes were fixed on the picture, which was modern and ugly—though surely, I thought, the subject had been painted often and beautifully enough by the old masters. Then I saw a fat fallow little priest—his chin, upper lip and cheeks blue from much shaving—come waddling down the aisle, and I wondered if he were Father Dempsey.

The curiosity that had drawn me into the church was rapidly ebbing. Everything—the smell of stale incense, the lighted candles, the cheap gaudy decorations—now struck me as vulgar and repellent. It all somehow seemed wrong—gross rather than spiritual—and my idea of confessing to a priest seemed wrong too. I rose and went out, the last thing I noticed being a thick sediment of dirt at the bottom of the stoup of holy water.

After tea I went up to my bedroom—George's and mine—and got out my books. On my way home I had felt half inclined not to go to Mr. Applin, but as the time passed I grew more and more restless. Work, at all events, was out of the question. I wished I had not gone into that church. It was this, I knew, that had discouraged me; and yet what valid connection had it with the step I proposed to take? True, I had not liked it, but what I had disliked was essentially superficial—the tawdriness and bad taste—and to allow oneself to be influenced by such things would be as stupid as to refuse to read a book because its binding happened to be unattractive.

I looked at my watch. It was already after eight, and I

decided that I would take a stroll in the park, and then, if I felt more in the mood, go on to Mr. Applin's.

I remained in the park till closing time : then I went for a walk. It was now getting late, but I was not very far from the house, and turned in that direction.

I rang the bell and asked if Mr. Applin was at home. Yes, the servant told me : who should she say wished to see him ?

I gave her my name, and remained standing in the porch for a longish time before she returned. Would I step this way. Just straight on up. And I obeyed her, feeling, now that the decisive moment was reached, less nervous than I had felt all evening.

At the top of a flight of stairs she opened a door, and I entered a large, untidy, lamp-lit study. There were bookshelves against the walls, yet the floor and most of the chairs were littered with books and papers. At the same moment a tall, thin, stooping figure rose from a table near the window, removing, as he did so, a green shade from his forehead. I was conscious of tired eyes that looked at me out of a pale emaciated face, and I was conscious, too, that either my imagination had deceived me, or that Mr. Applin became another person when he was preaching.

My impression of him now, at all events, was quite different from my earlier impression. His manner of greeting me was not exactly distant, not exactly chilly, yet it produced a discouraging effect—the effect, simply, that he was tired, and that he had no idea either who I was or what I wanted. I sat down in the chair towards which he motioned me, and wished that I had stayed at home.

‘You are Peter Waring?’ he said. My letter, in fact, was lying on the table he had just quitted.

‘Yes,’ I answered, and the conversation lapsed.

He had taken a chair opposite mine, and he leaned a little forward, the tips of his fingers joined, and swollen blue veins showing under the loose, wrinkled skin of his hands. He was much older than I had supposed—ten years at least—for I had taken him to be about sixty. He was wearing a shabby grey jacket, and I noticed that one of the buttons near the top was of a different colour from the others. My desire to confide in him had completely vanished. I glanced round the unfamiliar

room and maintained an awkward silence. It struck me that most likely the thought I had come either for a subscription to a cricket club or for a testimonial—something of that kind anyhow.

‘I got your letter,’ he murmured. ‘You wish to speak to me? You are not a member of my congregation, I think?’

‘No. I come sometimes in the evenings.’

I was thankful now that in my letter I had said nothing of my real purpose, and he evidently hadn’t the least suspicion of it. On the other hand, I was left with apparently no purpose at all, and this renewed my embarrassment.

‘Yes, yes—I understand,’ he went on, though what he understood was not precisely clear. ‘Well, don’t be afraid. If I can do anything for you I shall be very glad.’

I thanked him, and again became tongue-tied. It would have been absolutely impossible for me to have said what I had come to say, and nothing else occurred to me. He was too old, too far away; it would have been like stretching out your hands to try to warm them at the grey ashes in an early morning grate. I could see that he was making an effort to be kind—or at least to be attentive and courteous—only I felt that if I stated my business and said good-bye, it would be what he would like best.

‘I think I had better write,’ I brought out at last.

It was idiotic, and indeed appeared to surprise him. ‘Write?’ he echoed, raising his eyebrows. ‘But why? You *have* written! What is it all about?’ The last words were spoken somewhat querulously—even with a hint of senile impatience.

And at that moment there came a tap at the door, and a faded, elderly lady, possibly his daughter, entered, carrying a small tray, on which were two biscuits and a tumbler of hot milk. She bowed to me and wished me good evening.

I wished *her* good evening: I wanted nothing now but to get away as quickly as possible. Suppose I had been in the middle of my confession when the tray had been brought in! The whole thing was becoming dismally comic.

‘Are you in business or at school?’ Mr. Applin asked me, between two sips of milk. ‘You will excuse my drinking this while it is hot; but I had a funeral this afternoon, and I’m afraid I may have caught a chill.’

‘Certainly,’ I answered hurriedly. ‘I hope you haven’t. I mean, I hope you haven’t caught a chill. I’m sorry for disturbing you. I’ve really nothing to say. It’s only that I liked your sermons very much and wanted to tell you so. Please forgive me,’ I got up.

‘Sit down—sit down,’ he exclaimed, suddenly smiling. ‘It was a kind thought . . . Most kind.’ And he really did look pleased, and much more animated.

So I sat down again and he continued to drink his milk—with small, soundless, delicate sips. But the ice was now broken, his doubts—if he had had any—were removed, and he asked me to what church I belonged, where I went to school, and other similar questions. In the end we became almost chatty. A black and white cat, who had come in hopefully with the milk and biscuits, was now purring around my legs, and I stroked the cat and told Mr. Applin about Remus. Before I left he made me promise to come again.

Yet just as I was going out a sort of vague suspicion of other things did appear to float into his consciousness. He detained me, with his hand on my shoulder, looking as if he dimly felt that he had perhaps failed somewhere. ‘When you first came in,’ he said, ‘I got an impression that something might be worrying you, that you had something on your mind.’ He paused, and for an instant I saw in him just a glimmer of what I had seen when I had first thought of this visit—for an instant I was on the point of resuming my seat and telling him what I had come to tell him. But I felt that he did not really want me to, that he would be happier if I didn’t; and next moment indeed, with a little sigh of relief, he made it impossible by wishing me good night. ‘And when you come again you won’t be so shy?’ he added, smiling wanly.

He did not accompany me downstairs but stood on the landing till I had opened the hall-door. And as I pulled it after me, and walked on down the garden path, I knew I should never go back, and that I would appeal to nobody else.

Chapter 37

EASTER came and went ; spring gave place to summer ; and all the time I had kept studiously at my books, working even in the holidays. I saw less of Owen, for in the afternoons I played cricket and Owen did not. On the thirteenth of June the examinations commenced. They were public examinations—open to all the schools and carrying scholarships with them—and from the beginning I did well, having good luck with the papers. On Tuesday when I went home I had only one more exam. before me, and it would take place on the following afternoon.

It was a hot, breathless kind of evening, and I did not intend to work too much. I loafed about the shop instead, talking to Miss Izzy. She had asked me to go to the Free Library to get her a book, but nothing on the list she had given me was in, and I had come back with a tale of my own selecting.

'You might have got me one of Annie Swan's,' Miss Izzy grumbled, eyeing the work I had chosen, not so much dubiously as inimically.

'I thought you'd like this,' I murmured, disappointed.

'Annie Swan's are all good, and you could have looked up the catalogue. Mr. Dervock mentioned *Carlowrie* from the pulpit last Sunday.'

'But it wasn't in,' I said. 'Nothing on your list was in. I chose this specially : it's by Thomas Hardy.'

While I was speaking George appeared, fixing a carnation in his buttonhole preparatory to going out. 'Got to meet the girl at half-past eight,' he told Miss Izzy, with a wink at me behind her back ; but Miss Izzy took no notice.

'You get *Aldersyde* and read it,' she continued, as the shop door closed behind the gay and insouciant George, 'or *Across Her Path*.'

'I thought you said Carl Something-or-other.'

'*Carlowrie*. Well, so I did ; but there's no use having only one name on your list . . . If George McAllister would join the Church Literary Society instead of running about the

streets at night ! Who's this girl he's going to meet ?'

'I don't know. I don't believe there is one,' I said.

'Just talk, I suppose. Girls have more sense than to bother with a whippersnapper like him.'

'Do you think so ?' I murmured sceptically.

'Yes I do,' Miss Izzy replied. 'And so would you if you had any sisters.'

'I'm very glad I haven't,' I retorted, a little nettled by her dictatorial tone.

'Haven't what ?' Miss Izzy asked.

'Any sisters.'

Miss Izzy bounced round, brandishing a feather-duster. 'Why ?' she demanded sharply. 'What do *you* know about girls? They're better at most things than men are—only they're never given a chance. I suppose you think they're inferior.'

'I think they're different,' I answered. 'You might as well compare cats with dogs.'

'And we're the cats, are we ? It's a good thing you're still only a puppy.'

I tried to propitiate her. 'I didn't mean anything of the kind,' I said. 'Only there *is* a difference. Of course there are exceptions, but the majority of girls *haven't* much sense. They don't think——'

'Don't think !' Miss Izzy interrupted. 'Well, of all—— ! And you and George McAllister think I suppose !'

'George doesn't,' I admitted.

'But you do—especially about yourself. Do you know this, Peter Waring ; you're about as conceited as a monkey who's been taught a few tricks.'

'Well, I'm going away to-morrow,' I told her, 'and you won't be seeing me again for a long time.'

This wasn't quite fair perhaps, since I knew it would soften Miss Izzy, and it had indeed that result. 'I don't mind seeing you,' she confessed with a sigh, 'if that's all. It's hearing you talk that's the trouble. You may give me your photograph if you like.'

As she knew, I had had my photograph taken recently for Mrs. Carroll's birthday, and I immediately ran upstairs and brought one down. Miss Izzy, though she had seen it before, examined it critically. 'I've a red plush frame at home that's about your mark,' she decided.

‘Not red plush,’ I remonstrated feebly.

Miss Izzy looked from the photograph to the original. ‘Is red plush not good enough for you? You’d like a gold frame maybe?’

‘It’s not that,’ I said. ‘It’s only that I don’t like red plush.’ In fact I hate it. Can’t you put me in a plain frame? I’ll get one for you.’

‘No thanks. I always put a plain person in an ornamental frame.’

I said no more. There was never much use in trying to get the better of Miss Izzy in verbal skirmishes. Then, as customers appeared to be few—and partly also because it was my last evening—I sat down on an empty wooden case, and read aloud to her the opening chapter of the novel I had brought from the library.

It was my old friend *Two on a Tower*, and, as I turned the pages, the so different surroundings in which I had last read them kept floating back into my mind. When I had finished, and had drummed for a while with my heels against the box, I went upstairs and got out my notes on French composition to look through them before tomorrow’s exam. The room, although the window was wide open, seemed to me unbearably close; and moreover I felt tired and had the beginnings of a headache. I put up with the heat and stuffiness for half an hour; then I undressed, and sat down in my nightshirt beside the window—which looked out on to a dirty strip of back garden, usually threaded with clothes-lines, and forming, after dark, a kind of debased Paradise for dissipated cats.

At half-past ten or so George stepped jauntily in. ‘Hello!’ he exclaimed. ‘Still at it!’ He removed the now drooping carnation from his buttonhole, and flung it out among the cats; after which he began to turn over some papers I had laid on a chair in the exact order I required them.

‘You’ll mix those up,’ I told him irritably. ‘Leave them alone.’

George threw the papers down. ‘All right. Keep your wool on.’ Two or three of the sheets fluttered to the floor.

I picked them up in a bad temper, and George began to whistle—the same few bars over and over again. ‘Oh shut up!’ I said. ‘Can’t you see I’m working!’

‘Temper ! Temper !’ replied George cheerfully. ‘I’ll have to tell Katherine about this !’

He was standing before the looking-glass, examining a mosquito-bite on his cheek ; but at the very moment of speaking he knew he had made a mistake. He looked round with a sort of foolish apologetic grin. I too, knew that the words had slipped out unintentionally, for I had never mentioned Katherine’s name to him. There were, in fact, only two ways in which he could have learned it—either from Aunt Margaret, or else by reading my letters.

‘What do you mean ?’ I asked quietly, looking into his small, shifty eyes as they were reflected in the glass.

George tried to laugh it off. ‘Only a joke,’ he said nervously.

But I wanted a better explanation than this.

‘Who told you about Katherine ?’ I asked, getting up from my chair and walking deliberately over to him, while he spun round to meet me, with a forced smile.

‘What’s up ? What are you losin’ the rag about ? I didn’t mean anything.’

‘What’s up is that I want to know whether you’ve been reading my letters or not ? If you have, you must have unlocked the box I keep them in.’

‘I didn’t unlock any box,’ George muttered, backing away from me, his eyes never leaving mine.

‘You’d better tell me,’ I said, ‘because I’m going to make you.’ But George would say nothing further. He had retreated as far as he could, and stood now with his back against the wall. I struck him on the cheek with my open hand. ‘Answer,’ I said.

I saw his glance slide to the door, and anticipated the spring he made to get past me. Next moment I had him by the throat and we were struggling together. Suddenly I released my hold and flung him from me. He struck out as I came towards him again, but it was a weak half-hearted blow, and as I too struck, felt my fist in contact with his face, almost as if he had run up against it. He stumbled and nearly fell, while a dark-red stream poured down over his mouth and chin, and on to his shirt, making a horrible mess. He stood there, blubbering like a baby, but I did not hit him again. I simply watched him and waited. I knew he was really more frightened than hurt,

though his nose was bleeding profusely. But then it took very little to make his nose bleed ; in fact sometimes it bled spontaneously.

We must, all the same, have kicked up a considerable racket, for I heard the sound of hurrying footsteps on the stairs, and next moment our door was flung open and an extraordinary figure entered. It was Aunt Margaret—in a dirty old dressing-gown—her hair down, and her black eye blazing in her big puffy face. Her whole body shook with rage as she turned from the bleeding blubbing George to me. I stepped quickly out of her way, for there was something half insane in the white glare of hatred she turned on me. She said not a word, but, shooting out a hand, gripped me by the collar of my nightshirt, and began to rain down a torrent of blows on my head and uplifted arms. I protected myself as well as I could, and at last, with a violent wrench, tore myself out of her grasp, my nightshirt ripping down to the hem and flapping on either side of me. 'Stop that!' I shouted angrily, but she came at me again displaying, in spite of her unwieldy form, an incredible activity.

I knew there would be mischief done, for George never moved, and I saw her catch up a steel bar that was part of his trousers-stretcher. I was really frightened now, and wriggling out of the remains of my nightshirt made a dive to get past her and out of the room. I felt her nails scrabbling over my naked shoulder : at the same time instinctively I flung up my arm, and it may be averted a bad accident. For something crashed down over my elbow, striking me on the back of the head with a sickening jar as the floor swept up to meet me.

Chapter 38

AFTER that I don't quite know what happened, but when things became clear again I was in bed, with a rubber hot-water bag at my feet, and a pungent irritation of smelling-salts in my nostrils. Uncle George was in the room, hovering uneasily in the background, but the figure bending down over me was that of a stranger. He gave a queer little grunt as I opened my eyes and gazed up at him. 'That's a good boy,' he said. 'Now

lie still and don't be frightened. All I'm going to do is to put in three or four stitches and I won't hurt you much.'

I did as he told me, and muttering something imprecatory about the light, he proceeded with his task.

'Well, how do you feel now?' he asked when it was finished, and he had put on a bandage. 'Not too bad—eh?' He was looking down at me rather curiously.

'My head's pretty sore,' I answered.

'Yes, I dare say.' He mixed up something in a glass, which I drank, while Uncle George stealthily approached and stood in silence at the foot of the bed.

The doctor had begun to put away his things, but he glanced up at Uncle George, evidently suspecting his intentions. 'Leave him to go to sleep now: he'll be better able to talk in the morning. It seems to me he's been rather lucky—thanks to a remarkably thick skull. At any rate, it's not serious; though I'll look in again to-morrow.' He closed his bag with a snap, wished me good night, and with Uncle George meekly following, left the room.

The drink he had given me must have been a sedative, and a fairly powerful one, for it seemed to be morning at once, and the first thing I noticed was George's unoccupied bed. I wondered languidly why it *was* unoccupied? Perhaps the doctor had given orders that I wasn't to be disturbed, though that didn't solve the mystery of where George had spent the night. There was the bath—could one make up a bed in a bath?—and there was an extremely hard and slippery horse-hair sofa . . . The problem, however, did not really interest me.

I suppose it was the effect of whatever drug I had taken, but I myself had slept heavily, and still felt drowsy. The pain in my head, too, was a great deal less violent than it had been last night—more just an external soreness. In fact, apart from this, I felt pretty much as usual, and began to plan what I should do.

The first person to visit me was Uncle George, who tip-toed into the room, gazed at me, asked me how I was, and withdrew. But a few minutes later he returned, and this time he brought my breakfast with him. While I drank a cup of tea he sat in silence watching me, his whole countenance expressing an almost

ludicrous anxiety. But I said nothing, and after he had removed the tray I still neither spoke nor gave him any sign of encouragement. The truth is, I could see that his concern, though genuine, was not primarily on my account. Of course, he was sorry I had been hurt, but what worried him most was the uncertainty as to how I was going to take it ; and it seemed to me that a little suspense would do him no harm. Secretly, if he had only known, I felt not in the least resentful. What had happened cleared up all my difficulties, I thought ; and even placed me in a position to dictate terms.

‘She wasn’t responsible,’ poor Uncle George began dolefully, plunging straight to the heart of the subject. ‘You know she has to take medicine sometimes on account of the pain she gets, and I’m afraid it has an effect on her in other ways. I am telling you this between ourselves, Peter ; and last night she must have taken more than she intended, for I don’t think she knew what she was doing. You must forgive her . . . And then, she’s jealous—I may as well tell you that too. She’s jealous when she thinks of the difference between you and George, and that you will be a gentleman while George and the others will have to scrape along as best they can. And times are so bad, and there are so few openings for boys nowadays. This drug she had taken——’ He stopped, and his eyes gazed into mine appealingly.

‘What do you want me to do ?’ I asked, smoothing down the sheet, and on the whole distinctly enjoying myself.

Uncle George moved uneasily in his chair, but did not reply.

‘I’m going home this evening,’ I went on.

‘Home !’ Uncle George echoed in a startled voice. ‘You’ll surely wait for a day or two, won’t you . . . ? And then, there’s your examination. Will it make it all right if you get a doctor’s certificate ?’

‘Certificate for what ?’ I asked.

‘That you can’t go in for the examination,’ Uncle George mumbled.

‘I’m going in for the examination. And I’m certainly going home.’

Uncle George, who had never remonstrated with me on any subject since my arrival, did not do so now. ‘What will you tell them ?’ was all he asked.

By 'them,' I supposed he meant my father. 'Would you like me to say I fell downstairs?' I suggested rather unkindly.

Uncle George fidgeted, and I could see that this was what he *would* like. 'I don't want you to tell a lie,' he said—which was a pretty big one for him.

'Oh, I don't mind,' I observed pleasantly.

Uncle George pondered the matter. 'I suppose—there are times maybe—when it's better not to tell all the truth,' he faltered out at last.

'I should think this is one when it would be better not to tell any of it,' I replied.

Uncle George was silent. I was not letting him off particularly easily.

'There must, however, be two lies told,' I went on. 'The first by me, and the second by you—in a letter saying that you can't take me back after the holidays—that you haven't room—any reason you like.'

'But won't you come back?' asked Uncle George. 'You were always quite comfortable, quite happy, till—till this accident . . . And it wouldn't have happened if you hadn't been knocking George about,' he added.

'I was never happy,' I returned impatiently. 'Either you or Aunt Margaret will have to write as I say, or I'll tell my father exactly what occurred. This accident, as you call it, very nearly *did* for me : and anyhow, it's *only one thing out of a lot*.'

Uncle George swallowed audibly : then sighed. 'Your poor aunt wants to come and tell you how sorry she is.'

'My poor aunt needn't bother,' I returned. 'I know very well how sorry she is ; but it's not on my account. If the ceiling had fallen down and killed me outright I don't fancy she'd have minded much—except for the mess.'

Uncle George regarded me mournfully. 'You're very unforgiving, Peter,' he murmured. 'I know you've a right to say hard things, but still—'

It seemed to me that this was pretty cool. 'What do you mean by unforgiving? Haven't I promised not to tell?'

'It's not that,' said Uncle George.

'What is it then? Tell me. I'm being quite honest with you. Do you want me to come back, simply that you may make so much a week out of me? Don't you know that Aunt

Margaret hates me like poison ? Don't you know that she's usually more or less under the influence of whatever it is she takes--though you speak as if this was the first time ? I'm not such a fool that I can't see what's going on. She's always prying about among my things : she once read my private letters, and now I have to keep them locked up. Besides, in the beginning, you'd no right to offer to take me when you knew you couldn't give me a room to myself.'

Uncle George did not answer, but he looked, as he sat there the picture of dejection.

'I'm sorry if I've hurt your feelings, Uncle George, for you've always been very decent to me, and if there was no one here except you and Alice I'd come back. But as it is, I can't : I won't. I wanted to leave last Christmas, only my father wouldn't let me.'

As I watched him shake his mild grey old head, get up, and go out, I felt sorry for him--almost sorry enough to have promised to do what he wanted, which would have been foolish. 'If he's any sense,' I told myself, 'he'd have shut up Aunt Margaret in a honic, or an asylum, long ago.'

During the morning Alice came in to see me. The doctor also called, and examined my head. It was merely a scalp wound, he told me, and would heal up pretty soon. He thought I might return to Newcastle that afternoon if I was quite sure I felt up to it, and if I really wanted to. I somehow gathered from this, and even more from his manner, that he had formed a fairly correct opinion as to what actually had taken place.

At his dinner-time George appeared, looking sheepish, and shuffling his feet. 'How are you ?' he asked. 'Da says you're goin' home, so I thought I'd better drop in an' say good-bye . . . I'm sorry about this, Peter ; an' it's rotten luck about your exam. . . . I only read one letter, an' I only read that because I went to ma's work-basket to get the scissors and saw it there, lyin' open, an' read it without thinkin'. That's the God's truth, whether you believe me or not ; an' there was nothin' in it you need mind.'

'It's all right,' I answered. 'I know there was nothing in it.'

'All the same, it's damned bad luck about the exam.'

'It can't be helped,' I said. 'Besides, I'm going to have

a shot at it. It's not till three o'clock. Anyway, I'm going to get up now, and see how I feel.'

'Well, I'll have to be moving on. So long, Peter ; an' good luck.' He grinned as he held out a big hand, which, like his face, was covered with freckles.

Chapter 39

I SUPPOSE it was because I had done so well in the earlier papers that I was absolutely determined not to miss this afternoon's ; yet when I lifted my head from the pillow and sat up, I thought I should have to lie down again. It proved to be only a passing dizziness, however, and presently I was able to dress and go downstairs.

Miss Izzy was in the shop, alone. She gazed at me as if I had risen from the grave, and I couldn't help laughing, though it hurt me to laugh. From her countenance, and from the awed whisper which she seemed to find appropriate, I guessed that she must have heard something of what had happened ; but whether she had heard the truth or not was another matter.

'I'm all right,' I told her, in answer to her questions. 'At least, I've a bit of a headache—that's all.'

'Not much wonder !' Miss Izzy exclaimed. '*She* did it, didn't she ?'

'I fell downstairs,' I said experimentally. 'It was an accident.'

Miss Izzy paid not the slightest attention to this fabrication. 'She's getting worse. I don't believe she's in her right senses.' Then, after a pause : 'You're going home to-day. Mr. McAllister told me.'

'Yes : after the exam. Do you think Alice could pack my things ?'

'I'll help her,' Miss Izzy said. '*He's* out at present ; but he said he wouldn't be long, and as soon as he comes back I'll get him to mind the shop . . . I may tell you this,' she went on, with a glance at the door to make sure that it was shut : 'I've been looking after another job for some time back, and I think I've got one. I've had enough of *this* one, anyhow—

enough of her—and enough of him—frightened to open his mouth.

‘It’s not his fault,’ I put in quickly. ‘He’d be all right with anybody else.’ Then I added : ‘What’ll happen to the shop if you go ?’

‘What happened to it before, I daresay,’ Miss Izzy replied callously. ‘Though of course I’ll not leave without giving them notice.’

She had been scrutinizing me all this time, and now she shook her head. ‘I’m sure you oughtn’t to go near that examination. You’re as white as a ghost. Did the doctor tell you you could go ?’

‘He said I could go home : I didn’t ask him about the exam.’

Miss Izzy looked still more dubious. ‘Does *anybody* know you’re going ?’

‘Uncle George does—and George. At least I told them. I don’t think Uncle George believed me, but I can’t help that.’

‘As likely as not it’ll bring on brain fever,’ Miss Izzy mused pessimistically. A small customer had at that moment entered the shop, but she turned such a glare upon him that he thought better of it and hurriedly retired.

I laughed again. Miss Izzy, however, was serious. ‘You’ll at least take a cab,’ she said.

It sounded as if she thought I ought to take two, but I promised, and most reluctantly she allowed me to go.

At the cab-stand near the gas-works I got into a hansom and drove off. I kept my cap on the seat beside me, for the slightest pressure on my head was painful. Fortunately the distance was short, and once inside the big, cool, airy hall. I felt practically all right. My bandage, nevertheless, created a sensation. Everybody stared at me, and one of the invigilators came up to ask me if I had met with an accident. I told him that I had, but left his curiosity unsatisfied.

The paper suited me, and did not require any great effort, though I was glad enough to get it finished. Outside, naturally, I had to produce some kind of story to account for my appearance. I said I had fallen off a ladder. This seemed to me a more plausible explanation than the one Miss Izzy had rejected—especially since it was the back of my head that had suffered. Then Owen came along, and I was able to escape.

We entered the adjoining Botanic Gardens, and there, seated on the first vacant bench we found, I told him what actually had happened. Owen listened to me and expressed indignation and sympathy, but I could see that underneath this he was pre-occupied with his own worries, and that his thoughts were really hovering round the recent examination. Indeed, while we were still discussing my adventure, he drew the paper from his pocket and unfolded it.

From the very first day, as I knew, he had done only moderately well. Last year he had got an exhibition, but this year he was afraid that he would not retain it. He had given far too much time during the past six months to studies which had nothing to do with his school work, and a good deal depended—or at least he thought so—on the marks he got for this afternoon's paper. 'I wouldn't mind so much,' he muttered dolefully, 'only there's something I'm doing at present which my father may make me give up if I lose my "ex."'

'You're bound, anyhow, to pass,' I told him.

'That's no good. If I don't do better than that he'll say I've been neglecting my proper work. So I have, of course, but still—— Let's go over the questions, if you don't mind.'

I did mind. For one thing, it couldn't do any good at this stage, and for another, I had very little time; but Owen had already spread out the blue, printed sheet on his knees. 'What did you put for "cane-bottomed chair"?' he asked.

His persistence—and his indifference to my affairs—annoyed me. He didn't seem to realize that I might have been killed last night, or indeed to take the matter seriously at all. 'Oh, I don't know,' I replied; '*chaise cannée*, or something . . . Look here, Owen, will you come to see me off at the station? I have to go back to that house to get my things, and I'd rather have somebody with me.'

'*Chaise cannée*,' he repeated in a worried tone. 'I put *au fond de jonc* . . . What do you think?'

'Of *au fond de jonc*? I think it's wrong.'

Owen looked depressed. '*Chaise cannée*,' he muttered again. 'You know, it's not fair giving a comp. like that. I mean, it's simply crammed with words you never come across in any ordinary French book. It's more like an auctioneer's catalogue than anything else.'

'Well, it's the description of a spring-cleaning,' I said. He hesitated. 'What did you put for "fire-dogs"? Bristow put *chiens de feu*.'

'Bristow's a fool,' I answered. 'If you don't know a word, it's better to leave it out. *Chiens de feu* are the sort of beasts that'll be chasing him in the next world.'

Owen forced a smile, but it was a singularly dismal one: indeed, he looked so glum that I suspected he had put *chiens de feu* himself. 'You might drop that rotten paper,' I told him, 'and say whether you'll come with me or not. They're sure to try to keep me, and I don't want to stay: I can get a cup of tea at the station.'

'Of course I'll come. But tell me just this one thing.'

'What thing? Fire-dogs? *Chenets*, I suppose.'

'*Chenets*! Are you sure?' He frowned. 'You seem frightfully clever at out-of-the-way words!'

'It's not such an out-of-the-way word. As a matter of fact, it comes into *A. K.*'

Owen gazed at me uncertainly. In spite of his promise, I could see that another question was already hovering on his lips.

'Oh, come along,' I said, getting up. 'What on earth's the use of worrying over the beastly thing now! You can't *do* anything . . . I'm sorry, but *I'll have to go anyhow*.' And I tore my paper across and across, and watched the pieces go fluttering down the path on the wind.

Chapter 40

IN the morning the familiar tappings and scratchings of Remus at my door reminded me that I was at home again, and this time for two long idle months. I was very sleepy, but I struggled out of bed with half-opened eyes and let him in. As I closed the door again I trod on one of his paws. He gave a sharp yelp to warn me to be more careful, and then wagged his tail to show that he knew it had been an accident. Jumping on to the bed, which he could never do without a race, he scrambled between the sheets, and I followed, taking what room he would give me. I tried to go to sleep again while he was settling down

—a process which always took some time. Then, when he had thoroughly wakened me, he went to sleep himself.

I lay listening to his snorings and to the sea, and thinking of what I should do that day. I would bathe after breakfast ; I would take Remus with me and bathe off the sand, for he did not like diving, and when on the rocks had an extraordinary habit of trying to lap the water up to the level at which he wanted it. . . . But I had forgotten my plastered head : bathing, I supposed, would be out of the question for at least a week. So when breakfast was over I stuffed a book into my pocket, and strolled in the direction of Derryagh woods.

I had the long June day before me, and perfect freedom to do just what I pleased with it. The book I had chosen was *Twelfth Night*, the fascination of Count Tolstoy having suffered an eclipse. I had read him, as I had read so much else, under Owen's influence ; I had read no second work by him ; and the questions stirred up by *Anna Karénine* had sunk quietly to sleep. Owen, a week or two ago, had got hold of *War and Peace* and *The Kreutzer Sonata* for holiday reading, but I, though I kept this to myself, intended to follow other paths.

Perhaps it is the way of disciples to prove disappointing—to rush in hotly and cool down at leisure. Of the less worthy, that is to say, for Owen had not cooled. Early in the year he and I in conjunction had sent the sage a letter, protesting allegiance, and—improbable as it may sound—had actually received an answer, which, seeing that it had moved Owen almost to tears, I had allowed him to keep. He regarded it with much the same veneration as in former days devout Catholics may have regarded some relic of a saint. I thought myself that the letter was quite decent ; though that a man of world-wide fame—who must have been bombarded with communications from all sorts of people—should have found time, should have been courteous and generous enough, to reply to the epistle of a couple of youngsters far away on a benighted island, I'm afraid did not strike me then as a quite the surprising thing it really was. I had expected a reply ; and, of course, possibly just the fact that we *were* youngsters may have helped . . .

At any rate, we had been invited to write again—not at once but in a month or two : and Owen had written again. By that time I had had the sense to recognize that I was merely a shadow

in this matter, and to withdraw. Moreover, he had waited the full two months—which I, had I felt his enthusiasm, should have found difficulty in doing. The second letter, I had insisted, must be private. I had refused to take any part in its composition, or even to read it when it was finished, though Owen had told me more or less what was in it—a complete account of himself—of his father's position—of his own acquirements and abilities, his ideals, his religious problems—winding up with a petition for advice concerning the direction his studies ought to take, and the end to which his life should be dedicated. In a way, it might have reminded me of my own desire for confession, had it not been so completely practical and free from morbidity. The answer to it had not yet turned up, but I hadn't the slightest doubt that it would; and that when it did Owen would follow its counsels absolutely, even should these entail the wearing of peas in his shoes.

As I wandered into the Derryaghy woods I knew it was going to be a hot day, though it was not yet so hot as Remus, who was following me, pretended. I hunted about till I found a comfortable spot under an oak tree, and then stretched myself on the dry mossy turf. I took my book from my pocket but did not open it. I lay there in the bright summer morning—at peace, and yet not drowsy—while Remus gnawed at a fallen branch, stripping the bark off in sheets—a favourite pastime, though I never could see much in it myself. It was very quiet, very pleasant. Already I seemed to have cast, like a snake his old skin, the noise and grime and dinginess of town life, already I felt fresher, cleaner, happier.

After an hour or so I opened my book and began to read

*If music be the food of love, play on,
Give me excess of it, that, sweetening,
The appetite may sicken, and so die
That strain again! it had a dying fall,
O! it came o'er my ear like the sweet sound
That breathes upon a bank of violets,
Stealing and giving odour .*

Or should it be "south," not "sound"—the south wind?

It seemed the kind of thing that might have been written in these very woods. Romance!—romance! I felt it stirring in my blood, singing within me. I preferred it infinitely to *Anna Karénine*. This play of passion—where passion is never tormenting, never like Anna's and Wronsky's, never, perhaps, really passion, but only a kind of dreaming of love—somehow exactly suited my present mood. Love was the world I lived in, love was in the rustling of the leaves, love was in the breaking of the invisible sea, love was even in the snoring of Remus.

I closed the book, my mind filled with its music, while beautiful figures glided before me through the warm sun-drenched air. Viola in her boy's clothes—Olivia—moving in a dream. I imagined myself a page, visiting Olivia in her palace; I imagined her falling in love with me; I began, as usual, to weave a romance of my own, in which scenes from this other romance were mingled and transformed . . .

The sunlight pierced through the flat branches, and where it fell the earth was turned to brownish-gold. Green arcades opened out into the heart of the woods. Very rarely came the note of a bird, yet the woods were full of life. The flashing whites and greys of rabbits appeared on the clearing near the house; there were hidden movements in the brushwood, I roused somnolent Remus, for he liked it all as much as I did, and because he was so lazy was missing the greater part of it. We went down together to the stream . . .

We were out in the broad sunshine here, and the rocks and stones were hot. Dark, silky weeds spread on the surface, seeming to flow with the rapid shallow water, which came down cool and clear from the mountains. In the shadow of the rocks, under small cascades, were deep, foam-flecked pools, which looked almost black. Remus waded out into mid-stream and began to drink. Then he lifted his head, his red, dripping tongue hanging out, his dark gentle eyes gazing at me inquiringly.

The woods on either side of us were full of green shadow. We walked home over soft turf and across blazing fields dotted with fly-tormented cows. On our right the ground sloped gradually downward, forming a vast meadow, with a few scattered trees and flaming gorse-bushes; and beyond, under a deep blue summer sky, the open sea danced and gleamed, blue also.

with a long white line where the surf curled up over the brown sand

I left lazy and contented, conscious of little except the warmth of the sun and the beauty all around me. I was definitely free of the McAllisters. Owen, I hoped, would be coming to stay with me. Katherine would be coming. To-night I should be dining at Derryaghy. In the afternoon I would go in search of some of my old companions—go out with Willie Breen in his boat perhaps, though as a rule boating—even sailing—bored me. Childish and bizarre thoughts drifted through my mind. I wished the world was really the world of old romances and fairy-tales. This was the very day on which some miraculous thing might happen—on which one might find a magic door leading into a strange country that was yet close at hand. For all my life long I had had the feeling that such a country was there.

Chapter 41

DURING the next three weeks I led a solitary enough life, in the woods and by the sea. I read a good deal—and thought, and dreamed. In the mornings, and often in the afternoons as well, I went for long swims, and when my bathe was over lay naked in the sun on the rocks—sometimes for an hour at a time—so that the skin all over my body had gradually turned brown. And I was growing stronger. I could feel it, I could even see it in my limbs, which had become more muscular. With this increasing physical strength I suppose other alterations took place—alterations in my outward appearance, marking the passage from boyhood to youth. Annie Breen, for instance, had spoken to me several times of late in a way that betokened a consciousness of this change, and more than one girl I met on the road in the evenings, when wishing me good-night put something into her greeting that made it different from what it would have been last year. Several of the village boys no older than I had sweethearts, and I knew I had but to give a sign to one of these girls to have a sweetheart also. And while I held myself aloof, and responded with the barest politeness, at the same time I could not help feeling secretly flattered.

In the middle of July I received news of my examination. I had done better than I had expected, getting first place in the school, and third in Ireland. Nor had Owen really done so badly : at all events he had retained his exhibition.

Chapter 42

I MET Owen at the station, and as he jumped out of the carriage he cried : 'I've got the letter.' He waved it triumphantly in my face, beaming with the delight of it, and the pleasure of showing it to me.

'I can't read it here,' I said, grasping his bag.

'And I say, you know, you did rippingly in the exams. Of course I knew you would.'

He had come down by the first train, and I wanted to take him for a bathe, but he was so excited about the letter that he could hardly listen to me. I had brought our towels, and I gave Owen's bag to a carman outside the station, to take up to the house.

'Where are we going now ? It was jolly decent of him to write, wasn't it ?'

'Who ? Tolstoy ? Yes, quite decent . . . We're going for a bathe : I waited for you. It's some distance away . . . Unless you'd rather bathe off the shore.'

'I'll do whatever you like,' Owen said happily.

'Then I think we'll go round to Maggie's Leap.'

As we went, we talked of his precious letter. 'You won't like it, I dare say,' he warned me. 'It's not much in your line.'

'I wish you'd tell me what *is* my line,' I answered. 'I've been trying to discover it myself for the last three weeks.'

But Owen did not pursue the subject. 'There's one thing he says that I can't quite——' He stopped without finishing the sentence.

'Well ?' I asked him.

'Well, it's this. He says that everything in the Gospels . . . What I'm to do is to read over the words of Christ, and mark with a red pencil everything that is perfectly clear to me.'

'A red pencil ?'

The sarcasm slipped out involuntarily, and I was glad that Owen was too eager to notice it.

'Yes. Then I'm to concentrate on those bits, without bothering about the rest. In *them* I'll find everything that is necessary—necessary for me to know in order to plan out my life. The whole teaching of Christ, all that is essential, will be in them. Later on I can read over the other things—the things that were obscure—and perhaps by then some of them may have become clear. I'm to consider what kind of work I have a taste for, and at the same time the work itself must fulfil certain tests or I'm to have nothing to do with it. Work you do with your hands is best of all. I haven't shown the letter at home yet. I decided to think it over first down here, and discuss it with you. We'll read the Gospels together. My father wants me to be a solicitor and go into his office, but I don't much fancy that. On the other hand, I must make up my mind soon. I'm seventeen, you know.'

I took the letter from him, and read it slowly and with some difficulty while we walked along the road. After that I thought it over for a while.

'Will you have to earn your own living?' I asked.

'Yes, naturally. There are a good many of us, you know.'

'Then I don't see how the Gospels are going to help you.'

'Why not?' Owen asked.

'Because you'll have to live as other people live, unless you can afford to be different; and other people don't live according to the Gospels.'

Owen was silent.

'A carpenter, a gardener, for example,' he presently began: '—couldn't he live in accordance with the teaching of Christ? Tolstoy says I'll never be happy unless I do.'

'It's all very well for Tolstoy,' I answered. 'He's his own master and has plenty of money. But how can *you* be a carpenter or a gardener? Your father would never agree to it, and the first thing that would happen would be a quarrel with him . . . We go down here—over this wall.'

Owen scrambled after me. 'He might let me be a farmer,' he said. 'Anyway, a man must leave his father and his mother.' He was already quoting the Gospels, I perceived.

'Yes, Owen,' I told him, 'but you're not a bit the kind of

man who does. Besides, while you're learning to be whatever it is, your father will have to support you, whether you leave him or not.'

'I only mentioned those things because they were the first that came into my head. There are plenty of others.'

'There *aren't* plenty,' I contradicted. 'That's just the trouble *I've* been finding. And you ought to know yourself that it's all nonsense. I mean manual labour. It's like Ruskin and his pupils making roads. It's really only a pose.'

We clambered down on to the rocks. Below us the sea stretched away, deep and clear and blue, glittering in the hot sunshine, moving with a low smooth swell, like some huge, splendid, living creature.

'You'll require a profession in which you can be your own master from the beginning,' I went on. 'It wouldn't do, you see, to be subordinate to anybody who hadn't the same views as Tolstoy. If you're a subordinate you've got to do what you're told. Gospels or no Gospels. I don't think you'll find it so easy. And when you get married and have a lot of children your wife will tell you *her* views—which aren't in the least likely to be Tolstoy's.'

'I can choose a suitable wife,' he interrupted, 'and there's no need to have a lot of children. I'll have just as many as I can afford to bring up properly, and no more. That reminds me—I brought you *The Kreutzer Sonata*; it's in my bag.'

I didn't want *The Kreutzer Sonata*, and didn't intend to read it even if he *had* brought it. 'It's people like you who always have the biggest families,' I said.

'I tell you I won't,' Owen declared impatiently.

'But Tolstoy himself—'

'I don't care a straw about Tolstoy.' Then, as if he realized that this was going rather fast: 'I mean I know my own mind.'

'You don't. I remember your abusing Anna because *she* didn't want children.'

He ignored this. 'Tolstoy could give all his children a decent start in life,' he said. 'And if he can do that, the more children such a man has the better.'

I didn't dispute the soundness of the doctrine, though it suggested polygamy. As a matter of fact I was completely out of sympathy both with the letter and with everything Owen had been

saying. The three weeks during which I had not seen him appeared to have brought about a change. In me, I mean—certainly not in Owen. This might have been foreseen, for it was bound to happen sooner or later. He had drawn me in a certain direction—out of my natural orbit really—and removed from his influence, I had simply dropped back again.

We had been undressing while we were talking, and now I dived into the water, turned on my back and lay watching Owen who still stood at the edge of the rocks, with his shirt fluttering and flapping in the wind.

'Is it cold?' he asked, temporarily forsaking the argument.

'Quite warm: warmer than usual: come along.'

He pulled his shirt off, but with no great eagerness. I had never bathed with him before, and I recognized all the signs of the non-enthusiast. It would be one dip, I thought, and then a hurried drying and dressing. We would have been better after all on the sand.

'I brought you down some of the short stories too,' he shouted.

I laughed. 'All right, I'll read them when I come out.'

But Owen was chiefly anxious about the temperature of the water. He tried it gingerly with one foot. His face suggested a painful sense of duty rather than anticipated pleasure. At last he floundered in, and came up spluttering. He could swim in a sort of way—that is, he could keep himself afloat—but with more blowing and puffing than actual movement forward; and I circled round him, showing off.

He looked very funny in the water: obviously it was not his element. His eyes seemed to be bulging from their sockets, and his whole face had a fixed expression of extreme discomfort. I couldn't resist splashing him a little, which made him angry, with the result that he swallowed a lot of water. He spluttered, and swam for the rocks, where he scrambled out, scraping both knees and one elbow. I was shaking with suppressed laughter, but I said I was sorry, which he didn't believe, and on the way home I had to soothe him into a better temper. Then, as usual, his anger ceased quite suddenly.

As we drew near the house I began to wonder how he would like it, and what he would think of my father. I had told him what to expect; nevertheless I felt a little dubious. Before

coming to us he had been staying in Scotland with people who possessed a yacht, horses, and evidently plenty of money. We could not even boast a spare bed, and he would have to share mine.

But I need not have worried. I introduced him to my father, who was working in the garden, and before dinner was over I saw that they were going to get on together. Owen seemed to notice none of his peculiar habits ; or, if he did, to be indifferent to them. He displayed, too, an extraordinary interest in the school, asking all kinds of questions, and bringing out his own theories of education—which may or may not have emanated from the sage in Russia. I let them talk together without interfering much. I could see that my father was favourably impressed, though the fact that so exemplary a youth should happen to be a particular friend of mine was naturally perplexing. Here, at all events, was somebody very different from the Dales ! It was really Owen's simplicity that made the difference. And it was entirely unforced, entirely natural. He called my father 'sir,' and listened deferentially to everything he had to say, never offering his own opinion as of any particular value. Even the complete absence, in both of them, of a sense of humour, seemed to help. They talked almost exclusively of education. Owen mentioned that for some months past he had been coaching a boy in the evenings—the son of their gardener ; and he told us how clever this boy was, and how he had got Mr. Gill senior to promise to pay his college fees if he did well at school during the next year or two. It was the first time I had heard of the matter, but I supposed it was the mysterious 'something' which he had feared his father might put a stop to if he failed in his exam. 'Didn't he do splendidly ?' he said suddenly, nodding his head in my direction.

'Peter can be clever enough when he chooses,' my father answered drily.

This was to prevent me from exaggerating the importance of my achievement ; but I didn't care, for in my own mind that performance was already stale. Besides, I didn't care a fig for such things. It occurred to me, however, as I watched them and listened to them, that Owen and my father were really more alike than Owen and I, though my father had but a fraction of Owen's intelligence, and none of his generosity. And then I

thought that, though I cared little for Gerald, and was very fond of Owen, perhaps it was Gerald with whom I really had most in common

Chapter 43

OWEN and I were strolling leisurely along, and I was looking out over the sea-wall, when suddenly I saw her. It was a grey day and the air was full of mist and damp, which hung in heavy livid-coloured veils over the mountain-tops, and drifted half-way down the slopes. The wind was blowing from the shore, the tide was out, the sea calm. The flat curving beach of wet sand and shingle stretched in a wide crescent, broken by glittering pools, and at its edge, a little bent forward, her light-blue dress floating out behind her and one hand raised to hold the brim of a big black hat, she moved on, a solitary figure against the broad background of sea and cloud. It was Katherine, and, as I watched her, the whole picture reminded me of a Whistler water-colour.

A warm wave of eagerness, happiness, and excitement swept through me, yet for some reason—it may have been because of Owen's presence—I also felt strangely shy, so that I made no attempt either to hail or to go to meet her. I stood still. Yet here was the very moment I had so often lain awake imagining. Now that it was come, I was half inclined to retreat before she saw me. Owen, who perforce had come to a halt when I had, asked me what I was looking at.

'At Katherine,' I answered, continuing to gaze.

'Katherine?'

'Katherine Dale. Mrs. Carroll's niece.'

Then Owen turned to me in surprise. 'But aren't you going to speak to her?' he said.

Naturally he was astonished, for though I had told him little about her, he knew we were friends, and had known—though he may have forgotten—that she and Gerald were to arrive to-day. I did not reply, but we both clambered over the wall and crossed the beach to intercept her path. She had noticed our approach now, and had altered her own course to meet us.

As she came up she smiled her bright frank smile, completely devoid of self-consciousness, and held out her hand. She was perfectly natural and easy in her greeting, as if only a few days had elapsed since she had seen me last, whereas I began to stammer and splutter. I managed to introduce Owen, however, and we all three walked on together.

'I half expected that I'd meet you,' Katherine said. 'We only arrived about an hour ago, so you can't say I've lost much time. Gerald is up at the house : he was too lazy to come out : but I wanted a little fresh air after our travels.'

'There's p-p-plenty of it,' I stuttered.

Katherine smiled. 'I like it. I like wind.' She turned to Owen. 'Don't you ?'

Owen said he did, and immediately asked what kind of crossing they had had. I said nothing.

The crossing had been smooth, but for some reason the boat had been very crowded. Several people had been unable to get berths, and had tramped up and down the deck half the night : but then people always seemed to do that on the Belfast boat.

She continued in the same strain, but I was only half listening : I was lost in contemplation of her. 'Last winter probably she came out,' I reflected, with vague memories of Rhoda Broughton's novels. At all events, in twelve months she seemed to have put several years between us. It was quite likely that before long somebody would ask her to marry him ; and the thought of this—which had never even occurred to me before—immediately cast a shadow on my mind.

Meanwhile she was talking to Owen—or rather he was talking to her—explaining some theory of the influence of the tides upon the earth, and of the moon upon the tides. How, in the first ten minutes, he had contrived to get on to such a subject I could not imagine. But it was very like him, and Katherine appeared to be interested.

He had talked to Miss Dick the other night about Plato's *Republic*, and that too had been like him. Nobody else, I mean, would or could have done it. For Miss Dick was always at her silliest when taken seriously. She was incapable of fixing her attention on a subject for more than two or three consecutive minutes, and though she held certain views—political, religious,

social—derived from a deceased parent whom she constantly quoted, she would interrupt the expression of any of these to wonder what Ethel Davidson could possibly see in young Price.

And now he was talking to Katherine about the tides. I watched her face and could see that she liked him. She liked his appearance, I supposed—his strong yet boyish features—his clear eyes, with their kindness and innocence—for Owen, in spite of *The Kreutzer Sonata* and the rest, always seemed to me as innocent as a child. Yes, there was something fine about him—something clean and honest and honourable—and it was very visible in his countenance.

At present, however, he was rather monopolizing the conversation, turning it into a sort of scientific exposition: and I knew so well that he had been reading a little book about the tides—probably in the train on the way down. I began to feel impatient, but Katherine kept on asking him questions as if she found what he was saying absorbing. My impatience increased, and I first yawned and then assumed a bored expression—the sole result of which was that they both ignored me. My impatience turned to anger: I might just as well not have been there, for any notice that was being taken of me. ‘You ought to be a University Extension lecturer,’ I said suddenly. ‘You should write and ask Tolstoy about it.’

It was a singularly ill-natured thing to say. In fact it astonished me—almost as if the words had been spoken by somebody else. Inwardly I felt sorry and very much ashamed: inwardly I begged his pardon: yet outwardly I showed only a dark and sulky face. I made a remark to Katherine, but she answered coldly, and turned again to Owen, as if to make up to him for my bad manners. And instantly my penitence was changed into a sullen resentment.

Nevertheless, after we had left her, and were walking home together, I did have the grace to apologize. ‘I’m sorry for what I said,’ I muttered. ‘I don’t mean so much because it was rude as because it was rotten.’

The distinction was quite clear in my own mind, and I dare say Owen understood it too, though what he answered was: ‘I always do talk either too much or too little.’

Neither of us mentioned Katherine—purposely no doubt—

and this was a mistake, for our silence brought her closer—to me at all events—and raised a barrier between us.

After tea we went for a long walk, during which we discussed the old subjects. But not in the old way : in my present mood they bored me, Owen bored me, and what I really wanted was to be alone, so that I might recall the past and make plans for the future. What had happened was entirely unexpected, very strange, and most disappointing. I had been looking forward to the arrival of Katherine, looking forward to introducing Owen to her ; yet now that it had come to pass it seemed only to have upset everything. Contrary to our usual habit of loitering and talking, we went straight to bed as soon as we reached home ; and long after Owen had dropped asleep I was kept awake by anxious thoughts and misgivings. I tried to sleep, but could not. I grew more and more restless and wakeful and irritable. Owen was not exactly snoring, but he was breathing heavily, and I gave him a gentle kick. The strange thing is that I would never have dreamed of doing this to Remus, whose snores were at least five times as loud. But I kicked Owen. Of course I had not wanted to waken him—merely to make him breathe more quietly : nevertheless I did waken him.

Chapter 44

OWEN was waiting for me in the garden, sitting on the wall, nibbling nasturtium leaves and swinging his legs. We had arranged to call at Derryaghy House for the Dales, and with them climb Slieve Donard, but we found Katherine at the lodge. She was talking to the coachman's wife, a large stout good-natured woman whose loquacity was inexhaustible. We stopped and joined in the conversation.

'Isn't your brother coming ?' Owen asked after a minute or two, and Katherine said he was.

'He's up at the house : he's got some new music,' she went on, addressing me. 'Do you mind awfully—hurrying him up ?' She smiled. 'Do you mind ? It's just that if nobody fetches him he'll simply stay there.'

I complied, though not, I'm afraid, with the best grace. But

it seemed to me that I was always chosen for such messages. And if Gerald wouldn't take the trouble to come of his own accord I didn't see why he shouldn't be left behind. I knew the others wouldn't even wait for us; in fact, when I turned round to look, they had already begun to walk slowly on.

Gerald was in the drawing-room, busy with his music, and looking as if he intended to be busy with it all afternoon. 'Katherine and Owen are waiting,' I said shortly. 'Are you ready?'

He raised his head, and his peculiar eyes rested on mine speculatively. He was silent for at least a quarter of a minute. 'They won't wait long,' he then replied. 'Do you really want to climb that absurd mountain?'

I frowned. 'Why not? We arranged to do so, didn't we? Owen wants to.'

'Let them go, then . . . They've begun to study botany. Katherine was examining vegetables through a little lens all yesterday evening.'

His drawing irony made me furious. 'We must go,' I said. I could see well enough that he knew what was in my mind, that he had known for the last ten days. But he was the only one. I imagined, who did know, and I had begun to think that the spectacle of my jealousy was pleasing to him, and that he had his own ways of encouraging it.

He did not like Owen, yet for some reason he appeared to regard favourably his friendship with Katherine. That friendship had made astonishing strides in the past week. When we went anywhere together now, it was invariably Owen who was Katherine's escort. Things seemed to arrange themselves naturally in that fashion, and to-day was no exception.

It was not till I told him that I at least intended to follow them, and had taken a step to the door, that Gerald made up his mind to accompany me. And even then, when we were about a quarter way up the mountain, he suddenly announced that he had gone far enough, and would wait where he was till we all came down again. 'That is, if you're so selfish as to leave me,' he added.

Owen and Katherine were not in sight, for Gerald had made the ascent at the pace of the pilgrims in *Tannhäuser*. He stretched himself on the grass and, as if it were an amusing

question, asked me what I proposed to do. 'That Gill strikes me as a bore of purest ray serene,' he murmured, looking at me through eyes narrowed to the merest slits.

I did not know myself whether to stay with him or to finish the climb. I stood hesitating, with a face like a thunder-cloud. 'He's "pi," you know,' Gerald went on half mockingly. 'Not in the ordinary way, but in his own way, which is still more deadly. I suppose they're at the top by this time.'

That supposition decided me. I climbed up alone, and full of bitter thoughts. Presently I caught sight of Owen and Katherine far above me, but they never once looked back. I remembered that day—long ago it now seemed—when Katherine and I had climbed the hill from the Bloody Bridge valley, and how I had helped her over rough places—as I supposed Owen was helping her now—and walked hand in hand with her.

When at last I reached the summit I saw them standing together under the lee of a huge rock, gazing seaward. They heard my approach and turned round.

'Where did you leave Gerald?' Katherine laughed. 'I didn't think he would get very far!'

'You might have waited for me then,' I answered. 'You were in a great hurry to start!'

I knew it was impolitic—besides being quite useless—to take this tone; nevertheless it gave me a sort of relief to show that I considered myself badly treated, and I deliberately proceeded to be as unpleasant as possible. That I had joined them obviously had not annoyed them in the least—Katherine certainly had shown no annoyance when she had greeted me—yet I told myself that this was only pretence, and that they wished me away. And then—as I thought how there *might* have been some secret understanding between them, and that Katherine *might* have arranged to be down at the lodge when we arrived, with the express purpose of sending me back to the house for Gerald—I felt—though I did not really believe in any such scheming—a violent anger against them both.

When she saw the humour I was in Katherine at once ceased to take any notice of me, and this made me worse. I had not even sense enough to leave them. A kind of perversity seemed to force me to do anything I could to make myself disagreeable.

I had an insane desire to quarrel with Owen, and presently I contradicted him flatly when he made some harmless statement that was not even addressed to me. He flushed, and his eyes brightened, but he controlled himself. 'What's the matter, Peter?' he asked.

'Nothing,' I muttered sullenly.

I bounded away from them. I ran down the mountain side as fast as I could, leaping from point to point at the imminent risk of spraining an ankle. I did not pause when I came to where Gerald lay in the grass, but continued my headlong descent till I reached the woods. I had come down in an incredibly short time, and the very violence of my flight had probably kept me from falling. I walked on now at an ordinary pace, wondering what the others would think—for they could hardly help thinking, even if they said nothing. I had made an exhibition of myself—there was no doubt about that—but I did not blame myself, nor blame Owen; I laid all the blame on Katherine.

The woods were silent except for the occasional note of a robin, or the low twitter of a swallow. I stopped by a marshy hollow to look at a vivid splash of yellow irises, and I gathered an armful of them for Mrs. Carroll.

Chapter 45

OWEN and I dined at Derryaghy that night, but all through dinner I sat very quiet. No allusion had been made by the others to my having left them, which showed, I thought, that they must have talked the matter over and agreed to say nothing about it.

After dinner Gerald remained behind to smoke a cigarette, and I stayed with him. When we followed the rest of the party to the drawing-room, he immediately went to the piano and began to play. Owen sat by the window, looking out. He had not spoken to me since I had left him and Katherine at the top of Slieve Donard: I thought he had even avoided meeting my glance, but was not sure.

Katherine and Miss Dick had each some needlework: Mrs. Carroll was not with us. From my corner of the room I watched

Katherine as she worked, her head bowed in the lamplight ; and secretly, in my soul, I knew that Owen was more suited to her than I was. It is true, I did not believe he could love her so intensely, but the love he gave her would be less exacting, more unselfish. I became lost in gloomy thoughts. I knew they both belonged to a world where I was a stranger. In that hour, I knew it. And suddenly I felt how peaceful and quiet it would be in the thick darkness, with the grass over my head, and everything forgotten.

Gerald had begun to play the 'Moonlight Sonata,' and this unhappy vision came to me partly from his music. At all events, it hovered before me in an intensity of sadness beneath which I shut my eyes. At last I could bear it no longer, and making up my mind, rose and crossed the room to where Katherine sat. I pulled forward a chair and sat down near her, with my back to the others.

'Will you come out with me ?' I whispered.

'Out! Now, do you mean ?' She looked so surprised, and her tone was so incredulous, that I felt my anger stirring afresh.

'Yes, now,' I answered shortly.

She seemed on the point of refusing. 'Are you afraid ?' I sneered.

Apparently she did not understand me. 'Afraid !' she repeated, raising her eyebrows slightly. 'What is there to be afraid of ?' She gave me a long, distinctly doubtful look, and suddenly decided. 'I'll come in a minute or two ; let me finish this flower first.'

She returned to her work : she was embroidering a tablecloth for her mother's birthday. I, with burning cheeks, got up and went out on to the terrace. I thrust my hands into my pockets and whistled under my breath, in order to lend an air of casualness to my exit. Once beyond the windows, however, my whistling ceased abruptly, and I hurried round to the side of the house, where I waited in a fever of impatience.

She did not keep me long. She had come out just as she was ; evidently she intended our interview to be a short one. I hastened from the shadow to meet her.

'Do you know what I want ?' I began.

'You want to speak to me, I suppose,' she answered unsympathetically.

'Yes. I have so few opportunities now.'

Katherine bit her lip: I could tell that she was irritated. 'I should have thought you had plenty of opportunities,' she said, 'considering that you see me every day.'

We walked on for a few yards side by side. 'Are you offended with me?' I asked, trying to appear penitent.

'About what?'

There was something in the way she spoke, the way she looked, which seemed purposely discouraging; but I was determined to go on, no matter what might be the result.

'Everything—this afternoon, for instance.'

'I thought you weren't very nice to your friend this afternoon—if that's what you mean.'

'I wasn't. Nor to you.'

'Oh, it doesn't matter about me.'

'Why doesn't it?' I asked miserably.

'Well, it doesn't,' she replied. 'At any rate not so much. I'm not your guest. . . . Besides, I don't suppose I'm so fond of you as he is.'

I did not answer. The very quietness with which she had spoken hurt me as much as her actual words. It somehow seemed to make them hopeless—final; and for a minute or two I could not speak.

'Why have you changed?' I managed to bring out at last, my voice still not very secure.

'It is you who have changed,' Katherine said.

'Have I?'

'Yes. You know you weren't like this last summer.'

'I think I was.'

She was looking straight before her. Her face was grave, and she appeared to be reflecting, though evidently her thoughts brought her little pleasure. 'I don't know what has caused it,' she began, 'but there is a difference. I suppose you may not realize it yourself, but you seem now to be always moody and dissatisfied and ready to take offence. You weren't like that before.'

'I don't think you've treated me fairly,' I protested.

'In what way? You mean, I suppose, that I haven't treated you as if you were the only person in the world—or the only person to be considered. It's *really* that—and it makes every-

thing impossible. If things have changed, as you say they have, it's you who have changed them.'

'I first began to notice it in your letters,' she went on, as I made no reply : 'but I thought that when I saw you it would be all right. If I had known you were going to be like this I don't think I should have come at all.'

Yet her voice had softened a little—was kinder—as if her words hid a regret : though whether it was for our old friendship or not, I could not tell.

'What is it you don't like ?' I asked.

Her dark-blue eyes rested on me, while she hesitated. 'I've told you. Or at any rate I've partly told you . . . It's just that nothing seems to please you—that I never know how you're going to take the most innocent action or remark. You're furious if I speak more than two or three words to Owen, though it was you who introduced him to me. You mayn't be able to help it, but that sort of thing gets on my nerves.' Then suddenly she broke out : 'Oh, don't let's talk about it. What good can it do ? Whether it's your fault or mine makes no difference. I'm going back.'

Without waiting for me she began to walk quickly towards the house. I ran after her : I didn't understand either what had happened or what she meant ; but I made no further attempt to detain her or to question her.

Chapter 46

Nobody appeared to have noticed our absence when we returned. Gerald was still playing, though soon afterwards he got up and strolled over to the window, where he stood beside Owen's chair, looking out.

'There ought to be white peacocks,' he murmured. 'Don't you think so, Gill ? Coming across the lawn in the moonlight ; knocking on the windows with their beaks . . . Miss Dick, I'm sure, would like them.'

Miss Dick, to whom all Gerald's words were words of wisdom, looked up good-naturedly from her work. 'They *would* be nice,' she said.

Gerald smiled faintly, and Owen moved away from him, an expression on his face of mingled dislike and contempt which, had I not been so miserable I might have found comic. There was nothing, I knew, irritated him more than this kind of nonsense, which Gerald, who knew it too, manufactured with extreme ingenuity for his benefit. He began to manufacture some more, dwelling in a deliberately languid voice on the colour of life, and the tediousness and tiresomeness of persons blind to this quality. None of us except Miss Dick, for instance, seemed to appreciate the slightly morbid charm of white peacocks or to realize how appropriate they would be, standing in a row on the terrace, as a decorative background to his playing.

Owen leaned against the chimney-piece with his hands in his pockets. Why couldn't he see he was being ragged, I wondered? But he didn't. Nor could he keep quiet. There were people, it seemed, whom he found still more tiresome than the people Gerald referred to, and they were just those who imagined themselves to be superior.

Katherine looked almost beseechingly at her brother, but it had no effect. 'I entirely agree,' he returned blandly. 'And particularly when they write books like Tolstoy's *What is Art?* and discover that it's a sort of Child's Guide to Morality. Only how is one to stop them?' The artist, of course, *is* superior—which, as you point out, Gill, is a very different matter.'

'I didn't point it out,' Owen retorted, flushing.

Gerald smiled benignly.

'Oh, shut up, Owen,' I interrupted, for I could see that he was losing his temper. 'What's the use of taking everything so seriously?'

'Because everything *is* serious,' he answered, and then frowned and was silent.

We all gazed at him, but Miss Dick alone thought it necessary to say something. She remarked that the Charity Organization Committee to which she belonged had been able to do a great deal, and that the lecture with lantern slides had brought in over three pounds—she meant even after all expenses had been paid.

Gerald laughed, and so did I, though I was in anything but a laughing mood. But Gerald immediately straightened his face. 'What has morality to do with art?' he pursued serenely.

'or art with morality ? You, Gill, cannot tell me ; nor can Peter. Therefore you are annoyed—which is unreasonable—and even turn a disapproving eye upon poor Miss Dick, because she speaks of white peacocks, and wishes to establish them at Derryaghy—which I admit myself is going a little far.' He paused and glanced at me. 'Is anybody coming down in the direction of the Golf Club ?'

But I shook my head, though I felt half inclined to accompany him.

Chapter 47

NEVERTHELESS, Owen and I left shortly afterwards. We scarcely exchanged a word on the way home, but when we were in our room, undressing, he said to me : 'I'm going back to town to-morrow.'

The announcement was abrupt, and I looked at him with a feeling of dismay. For I could tell from his voice that he had made up his mind, and though I guessed the reason behind his decision, the decision itself was none the less unexpected.

'To-morrow !' I faltered. 'You can stay till the end of the week, surely !' Then I determined to have the whole thing out. 'Is it because I was rude to you this afternoon ?'

'No,' he answered, though next moment, with his usual distaste for half-truths, he added : 'At least, not altogether.'

I could not think what to say, but he went on himself, speaking quietly and without a hint of resentment or reproach. 'I know you would rather I wasn't here : that is my reason. I ought to have seen it before, but I didn't, though once or twice I had a suspicion that something was wrong. It's partly your own fault, I mean, you could have warned me. I remember now, of course, what you told me on the night of our party—about loving a person very much—but I didn't until to-day connect the two things. I do now.'

'You think I'm jealous ?' I said unhappily.

'I know you are. Just as I know that—so far as I'm concerned—there isn't, and never was, the slightest reason why you should be. But don't imagine I'm offended or anything of that

kind. Of course I'd have liked it better if you had spoken to me openly : I expect it's always better in the long run to say what you feel. In this case it certainly would have been. You see, though I like Katherine, and like her very much, it's you who are my friend.'

'She won't want you to go,' I told him. And at that moment I didn't want him to go myself.

'She won't mind, and I really can't knock about with her brother. I can't stand him.'

'Couldn't we knock about by ourselves ?' I mumbled unconvincingly.

'I'm afraid it would hardly do to drop them now.'

There was a silence.

'I don't know what to do.'

He sat down on the side of the bed. I stood at the end of it. We had both stopped undressing.

'About what ?' he asked.

'About anything. About everything. About your going away. About Katherine.'

'But when I'm gone won't it be all right ?'

'No : it will be all wrong. I've been beastly to you . . . And—she doesn't like me. I mean she only likes me if—if we're just ordinary friends. She told me so this evening. And I can't be that.'

'But you'll have plenty of time now to make it up.'

'It isn't that. We haven't quarrelled. There's nothing to make up . . . But the other— It's no use . . . I wish I could explain . . . It's really far worse than nothing . . . It's awful . . . Things come into my mind—and I know they never would if she was different—if she cared—if I could be happy.'

Owen was silent.

'And I've been beastly to you,' I repeated.

'You needn't worry about that,' he said. 'I'm not such a fool. So far as I'm concerned everything's exactly as it has always been. It's you and Katherine I'm thinking about.'

He was silent again for a minute or two. Then he began : 'There's one way, but I'm afraid you won't take it.'

'What is it ?' I asked.

'Come back with me, and spend the rest of your holidays with me.'

I did not answer. I finished undressing and so did he. After all I had said I was ashamed to answer—for I knew he was right. I turned out the light and got into bed.

‘Will you?’ Owen asked.

In the darkness I shook my head. Then remembering he could not see me: ‘No, I can’t,’ I said.

‘Why not?’ he persisted. ‘It’s only a matter of will.’

I knew it was, but I didn’t feel that I had any will—except in one direction.

‘You could try it for a few days,’ he went on.

‘No. There won’t be many days even as it is. They’ll be leaving before the end of the month.’

Owen seemed to give it up, but he showed no impatience.

‘Well, if you should change your mind, come at any time. I mean without bothering to write.’

‘Very well . . . Thank you, Owen.’

He lay quiet for so long that I thought he must have dropped asleep, when suddenly he spoke again.

‘Peter.’

‘Yes?’

‘I didn’t know if you were asleep or not . . . It’s this. I wrote to my people about you—about your having to go to lodgings when you come up to town after the summer; and they want you to come to us instead.’

I felt horribly ashamed.

‘You see, there are plenty of bedrooms, and my study, I dare say, would do for both of us to work in. I hope you’ll come: they all want you to: they all like you. If you think you’d care for it I’ll speak to your father tomorrow morning; but of course if you’d rather be in ‘digs’ and on your own it would be better for me to say nothing.’

‘Do you really want me to come?’ I asked, for I could hardly believe it.

‘Of course I want you.’

‘I mean really and truly—not just out of kindness.’

‘Really and truly,’ he said.

‘Yet still I was doubtful.’

‘I suggested it because I’d like to have you,’ Owen continued. ‘I wasn’t a bit sure whether *you’d* like it or not. Anyhow, my reason for asking you has nothing to do with

kindness: it's entirely selfish—if that makes it more satisfactory.'

'I'll come,' I said. 'Thanks awfully,' But, though I felt grateful and very much touched, I did not feel happy.

And almost the moment he stopped talking to me my thoughts reverted to Katherine. In my mind—and I could remember every word we had spoken—I went over and over again our last interview, trying to extract some faint kind of hope from it, and finding none. I tried to look at it from her point of view, but that did not help me. If she had never encouraged me, I thought, it would have been different—but she had. And that was what made it hopeless. You can go on hoping about something still unborn, but not about something that is dead. What she had said was true; I did want her to consider me first: nevertheless it was not true in the way she had meant it, and it was inevitable. She *had* treated me badly, she *had* let me down. And what was the use of asking me to change now—merely because she herself had changed. You might as well ask a person not to feel hungry, not to feel thirsty, not to feel tired. In such a case all you really wanted was to be deceived, to be told a lie—anything that left you free to forget what was distasteful and perhaps uncomfortable to remember.

Chapter 48

I DO not know whether Katherine attributed Owen's sudden departure to me or not, but I think it quite probable that she did, although she never mentioned it. For that matter, we never mentioned Owen at all during the days that followed. Superficially, we seemed to have slipped back more or less into our former friendship, and I tried to feel that it was must the same. But it wasn't, most of the old freedom was gone, and I could not forget what Katherine had said to me that night when I had accused her of having changed. In spite of this, I longed to have another day, or half a day, alone with her—such as had happened now and then last year—and I determined to propose it. After all, at the worst she could only refuse.

It was with this intention that I went up to Derryaghy one morning. I met Mrs. Carroll half-way down the drive. Mrs.

Carroll—the least suspicious person in the world—was completely unconscious that anything was amiss. I think she still regarded us all as being more or less children—even Gerald. At any rate she told me that Katherine had been washing her hair and was now drying it at the kitchen fire. She told me to go on in if I wanted to speak to her, and this, without a second thought, was what I should have done last year. It was a sign of the change that had taken place that now I hung back. Yet in the end I went, and discovered her sitting on a stool, a book open on her knee, and her long brown hair hanging loose in the red glow of the kitchen range.

She looked up, saw perhaps my diffidence, and smiled. 'It's well for you that you haven't to undergo such torments,' she said. 'You'd hardly believe it, but my hair was simply full of salt! How on earth salt can get through a bathing-cap which is supposed to be waterproof is a mystery, yet it does.'

I stepped forward, gazing at her in silent admiration that she must have noticed, for she coloured, though she laughed. 'Well Peter, aren't you even going to say good morning to me?'

I hastily apologized. 'I'm sorry. I forgot.' Then involuntarily I stretched out my hand and touched her hair.

She laughed again, but drew back, and I drew back also.

'I came to ask you to go for a walk with me this afternoon . . . Round by the Hilltown Road—by the road under the mountains—just you by yourself.'

She opened her lips to say something, but I don't know what it was, for she did not say it. 'What time do you want to go?' she asked.

'After lunch.'

'Very well.'

I stayed only a few minutes longer—partly because the cook had come in with a basket of vegetables—and partly, too, I didn't want to give Katherine time to change her mind.

I walked home thoughtfully. Was it all right? I wished she hadn't hesitated before saying she would come, but perhaps there was nothing in that, perhaps she hadn't been going to refuse. I wished I *could* take things differently—take them more easily—take it for granted now, for instance, that she wanted to come, and not break my heart about it even if she didn't.

I had nearly reached the corner of the Bryansford Road when I saw Gerald. He must, I thought, have been down either at the Hotel or at the Club House, and this immediately awakened another train of thought. I went to meet him, and turned back with him. 'Where have you been?' I asked.

The question wasn't prompted by inquisitiveness, though I dare say it sounded inquisitive. At any rate, he looked at me with an amused expression. 'Peter,' he said, slapping me on the shoulder, 'I may be wrong, but I've a strong premonition that I'm about to see you in a new and most unsuitable part—that of mentor at the very least.'

I did not answer. I had not intended to act the part of mentor, but it was quite true that I thought someone ought to do so. I knew he had formed a habit of dropping in at the Hotel, but I had hitherto supposed that he went only in the evenings. I don't imagine that the others knew, and I had no idea myself at what hour he was accustomed to get back. But Derryagh was an early house; he had a latch-key; and if he came home late, and not quite sober, nobody would be any the wiser.

'Well?' he continued, laughing. 'Why this sudden timidity?'

'It's none of my business,' I said. 'It seems to me stupid—that's all.'

'I know. Fire away. Your friend Gill would tell you that it *was* your business; and I can at least promise that I won't be-offended.'

'I was only with you once,' I said, 'and then not for very long. But I didn't like it.'

'What didn't you like, Peter?—the place, the company, my behaviour, or all three?'

'Of course if you're not going to take it seriously there's no use saying anything.'

'But you don't know how I'm going to take it,' he replied. 'It hasn't become serious yet.'

'I thought it silly,' I said abruptly, 'and all wrong. You're not quite nineteen; and one or two of those chaps you were calling by their Christian names must have been nearly forty.'

'One perhaps,' Gerald admitted. 'Do you think I ought to have called him "sir"? Because I assure you he wouldn't have liked it if I had.'

'They were all a great deal older than you anyhow,' I said ; and you know yourself that they'd have bored you to death if there had been no drinks going.'

'They certainly would,' Gerald returned lightly. 'But then, you see, there *were* drinks going.'

'What do they care for your playing ?' I went on. 'And what, for that matter, *were* you playing ?—except a lot of stuff you thought would please them.'

'But that, Peter, surely was very nice of me—seeing that the pleasure was innocent. Or would you call it imbecile ? I remember, too, that you made no objection at the time. In fact you never once opened your mouth, though I introduced you to the whole crowd.'

'If I didn't, it wasn't because I was impressed,' I answered shortly.

'You mean you felt superior to them all—like the people Gill objects to.'

'Yes,' I replied.

Gerald smiled. 'Well then, we needn't argue about it ; because I felt you were, also.'

'Only there's something you perhaps forget,' he went on presently, and not quite in the same tone. He stopped, however, and coloured.

'What ? I asked.

'Well, that these things aren't always a matter of choice.'

'How do you mean ?' I said. 'They're certainly not a matter of compulsion.'

'No, but they're sometimes a matter of acceptance—or substitution . . . I might, for instance, have very much preferred being alone with you ; but what good would that have done me ?'

'Why ?' I asked uncomfortably. 'I don't know what you mean.'

'I think you do,' he answered slowly. 'However, let us say that it takes two to make a friendship.'

I hesitated. 'Why should you think I don't want to be friends with you ?' I said ; 'for you evidently do think it.'

Gerald's face altered. All that was half bantering, half amused, went out of it—and out of his voice too. 'It would take a long time to explain that,' he replied. 'It never gave

me any particular pleasure to think it, as I dare say you know—at first, very much the reverse . . . Until I got used to it.

I looked at him in silence. I knew that he was speaking the truth, and I wished he wasn't. 'Isn't my talking to you about all this a proof that I'm friends with you?' I asked at last.

'No, Peter, it isn't. It may prove that we're not enemies, and that you don't like to see me forming what you think are bad habits: but your friends are Katherine and a prig called Owen Gill.'

'Owen isn't a prig,' I returned warmly, glad to seize upon a side-issue.

But it ended there: I could see that he was too indifferent to Owen to care whether I thought him a prig or not. Moreover, I imagined that he regretted having said as much as he had said. This was little, doubtless; yet perhaps I guessed more—guessed at least sufficient to make all human relationships seem to me hopelessly muddled, complex, and unsatisfactory. And then I began to reflect. It was a good thing, I told myself, that we each had something which did not depend upon other people: Gerald his music; Owen his search for truth; I— But unhappily the generalization failed here; for, so far as I could discover, I had nothing.

Chapter 49

THE day had grown much hotter, and the August sun was blazing in a nearly cloudless sky, when I went back to Derryagh. Katherine was sitting in a deck-chair in the porch waiting for me, and Gerald must have been in the house, for I heard the piano.

Katherine was wearing a white muslin dress, patterned with little green sprigs, and with a belt of dark moss-green velvet. She looked fresh and cool, and to me lovely, while, in my rough tweed jacket and not too clean flannel trousers, I knew I must present a remarkable contrast.

'Do you remember our first walk?' I asked her, as we crossed the lawn. 'I mean, just after I got to know you—'

when Gerald came part of the way and then wouldn't come any farther—and we met that man.'

Katherine of course remembered. 'It seems centuries ago,' she said. And after a pause: 'I wonder if Bryansford isn't so far for this afternoon? The others mentioned something about driving over.'

Did she mean that she wanted to go with the others, I immediately asked myself? But she could hardly mean that, for there wouldn't be room in the carriage. Unless only Mrs. Carroll and Miss Dick were going; or unless Gerald or I sat on the box beside the coachman: then of course there would be.

'It was a day just as hot as this,' I went on: 'only we started in the morning.' And I would have liked to recall each of its happenings, but Katherine did not seem interested, and the moment I broke off began to talk of other things.

We did not go by the sea, but took a short cut across the fields, keeping as much as possible in the dark shadow of the hedges. Presently we struck the lane I was aiming for, which led us past a long low farmhouse, where an immense cherry tree, with a trunk nine or ten feet in circumference, spread its branches in a small green orchard. I had often eaten cherries from that tree, and the orchard itself had always reminded me of a poem by William Morris—the beginning of a lyric, which comes, I think, into *The Life and Death of Jason*:

*I know a little garden-close
Set thick with lily and red rose,
Where I would wander if I might
From dewy dawn to dewy night,
And have one with me wandering.*

In the old days I should have repeated the lines aloud: now I said them to myself. Two friendly dogs wagged their tails, and a cat, lounging on the grey stone wall, unclosed his eyes in sleepy yellow slits. . . . And suddenly it became unbearable.

'Can't we be friends, Katherine,' I begged, 'as we used to be?' She drew in her breath, hardly audibly, yet I heard it. 'I thought we *were* friends,' she said.

It didn't sound like it. The hint of veiled resignation in her voice suggested rather that the whole theme had become

for her worn out, if not positively boring. 'You know what I mean,' I muttered.

'I don't ; and I doubt very much if you do yourself. I know that you're discontented ; and for some reason disappointed in me ; but nothing more.' Then she added : 'You're a very queer mixture, Peter. I wonder what you'll be like ten years from now.'

I looked at her quickly. The last words, spoken in a dry yet good-humoured tone, were both unexpected and puzzling. But I did not ask her to explain them, and we walked on in silence.

There was, at the point we had now reached, a peculiar grandeur in the landscape, which even in my present mood of nervousness and misgiving impressed me with a sense of solemnity. From childhood I had always imagined—quite without historical evidence—this particular spot to have been the scene of ancient druidical rites. I thought of the dark soil as having drunk up the hot sweet blood of human sacrifice, while the 'pale-eyed priest,' lifting his gaze to the clear sky, had watched against it just the same dark line of mountains that I was watching now.

We reached the main road, still in silence, and when we did begin to speak it was of things to which we both were indifferent. Nothing was going right ; we were not in sympathy ; it was as if we never could be again. And I had the hopeless feeling that I was failing to interest her, and that while she was talking to me her thoughts really were far away. It seemed impossible to get beyond the meaningless exchange of commonplaces. Perhaps it would have required a more determined effort than in my timidity I was capable of making ; certainly I felt that Katherine was making no effort at all. I began to wish we had never started. Or to say so to myself at least, for I did not really wish it ; I wished, in spite of everything, still to be with her. Only, before we reached Bryansford, I suggested that we might be able to get tea at one of the cottages, for I felt that any interruption of an active and external kind would be a relief.

And so it was. The sense of estrangement still lingered underneath, but on the surface things became more normal, and Katherine no longer seemed bored.

Nevertheless, when we came out again, instead of continuing our way under the mountains as we had originally planned, she decided that we ought to start for home. 'At least let's go back through the woods,' I pleaded; and to this she raised no objection.

We entered the estate that lay beyond Derryaghy. It was strangely still here, for the path was sheltered by two high thick walls of laurel. On and on we walked, hardly speaking till suddenly the dead silence and our complete solitude became as it were visible to me—the only reality. And simultaneously, as if communicated by some will outside my own, there arose in my mind an intensely vivid memory—the memory of the dark landing in Owen's house—of Elsie—of what had happened there. The whole thing came back to me almost with the strength of hallucination—the feeling of my mouth pressed on hers, the feeling of her yielding body as she closed her eyes under my embrace. I grew more and more nervous. I felt myself trembling, and a mist swam before my eyes. I put out my hand and tried to take Katherine's—or rather some force within me put out my hand—but she drew away from me at once. I stopped short, facing her on the narrow path. 'I want to speak to you,' I said. 'What have I done?'

She tried to pass me, but I barred the way. I became conscious, through other things, of a smouldering anger against her. I half hated her now because of her attraction for me, because of all I had gone through—now hoping, now despairing—only to be turned down in the end like this. I had offered her all that was good in me, and because she had rejected it I felt that, forced back upon me, it had turned to something different. 'Why do you draw away when I touch you?' I asked bitterly. 'I am not a leper. You once told me that you cared for me.'

She looked at me coldly. 'Please don't talk like that,' she answered. 'I don't know what's the matter with you or why you are standing there.'

And all the time that memory, that vision, though I had lost sight of it, was acting like a hypnotic suggestion on my mind. 'You know I love you,' I persisted gruffly, my voice getting out of control, though I tried to speak quietly. 'Tell me, would you rather have Owen? Or is there anybody else?'

'I certainly *won't* tell you,' she answered. 'And now, kindly allow me to pass.'

Her eyes were fixed on me in a sort of watchful anger ; she was very near ; I was passionately conscious of that. I threw my arms round her ; I could feel her body straining away from me, her breath on my face. For an instant she seemed to submit as I kissed her ; but next moment she struggled from me, and I felt a blow on my mouth : she had struck me with her open hand.

Her eyes flashed on me like a withering fire. She was furious, but not in the least afraid. 'How dare you touch me ! Let me pass at once, you—you beast.'

My arms dropped to my sides. A sudden bitter shame overwhelmed me. I saw her walk on with head erect and flaming cheeks, and then I dropped on my face to the ground.

When I got up she was out of sight. I did not know how long I had lain there, but I made no attempt to follow her. Mechanically I brushed the earth and moss and twigs from my clothes, feeling still a little dazed. It was all over, and I did not want to think. I heard the clear prattle of a stream, and became aware that I was extraordinarily thirsty. I clambered down to it, and followed the bank till I reached a deep pool, from which, stretched flat on the ground, I drank greedily. Still I would not think of what had happened. And as I raised my head I saw my own image in the water—my lips pouting, my eyes bright and humid, my face flushed and dark, my coarse tumbled hair.

Chapter 50

I HAD told my father that I should be dining at Derryaghy, yet he made no remark when, instead, I came home an hour late for tea. Fresh tea simply was prepared for me. Nevertheless—perhaps partly on this account—while I sat at the table I was vaguely conscious of something unusual in the air, though I was far too unhappy to wonder or care what it might be. As soon as I had finished, however, my father spoke. 'I had a letter from your Uncle George this afternoon.' And im-

mediately, from his manner, I felt sure that an accident of some kind must have occurred.

My thoughts darted straightway to Aunt Margaret—to undefined tragedies—murder or suicide. ‘What is it?’ I asked. ‘What has happened?’ Perhaps it had to do with Alice, it might be anything: why couldn’t he tell me at once? Then I noticed that he had pushed a bundle of photographs towards me across the table.

‘Do you know anything of these?’ he said, in a carefully restrained, yet disgusted, voice.

I started. A glance at the top one had been sufficient. I recognized the photographs George had kept hidden in our room—or others like them. In extreme embarrassment I looked at my father, whose eyes were fixed on me, not angrily, but in a kind of hopeless way.

‘They were found by Aunt Margaret in your bedroom, hidden under the floor. Uncle George says that George knows nothing about them, and that being the case, he felt it his duty to tell me.’ He glanced down at the wretched things as they lay there, with a kind of horror.

I sat silent for a moment, thinking. ‘They’re not mine,’ I then said. ‘They never were.’

A gleam of relief came into his face, but it faded quickly. ‘You never saw them before?’

I lifted the top one, but instantly put it back again. I felt horribly ashamed that he should have seen them—that they should be lying there now on the table between us: Uncle George surely might have been content with a written description. ‘Yes,’ I answered, ‘I did see them,’ and my father winced. ‘I saw them once,’ I went on, ‘but they never belonged to me. Even if I had wanted such things, I wouldn’t have known how or where to get them.’

‘Did you know of this hiding-place?’ he questioned me. ‘Yes.’

‘Only you and George occupied that room.’

‘And George says they aren’t his.’ I looked towards the window.

My father hesitated. Then he said solemnly. ‘Will you give me your word of honour, Peter, that you had nothing to do with their being there?’

'Oh yes,' I answered quietly, 'if you'll take it. I knew about them, of course, because George showed them to me ; but they weren't mine. If he was here now I don't think he would say they were. At least he might—I don't know. At any rate he had them—or some of them—before I ever went to the house. On the very first night he was going to show them to me, but he changed his mind and actually I didn't see them till just before I came home at Christmas. I never would have seen them at all if you had let me leave when I first wrote to you.'

'You gave me no reason,' said my father quickly. 'Do you think I would have allowed you to stay an hour in that place if I had known ?'

'You might have guessed that there was *some* reason,' I replied.

He looked at me closely. '*Was* that the reason ?' he asked ; and waited, his eyes fixed searchingly on mine.

I hesitated : there had been so many reasons. 'Not just then,' I prevaricated ; and I felt he knew I was concealing something. 'But afterwards, at Christmas—in a way—more or less . . . That and—other things.'

My father sighed. He tore the photographs in two and placed them in the empty grate, where he set fire to them. It was like an act of purification, and when it was concluded he turned round and said gloomily : 'I'm sorry if I misjudged you. I accept your word.'

And I suppose he did accept it, after a fashion. Yet it did not seem to make much difference. It exonerated me on one account, but the fact remained that I had looked at those photographs—perhaps enjoyed looking at them—perhaps pored over them : George could not have made me do that. On my own admission I had touched pitch, and therefore on my own admission I was defiled. I saw all this reflected in his face, and the injustice of it exasperated me. 'Do you believe me or do you not ?' I asked brusquely.

'I have told you I believe you.'

'You don't look as if you did,' I retorted ; but my father's expression remained unchanged.

'If you had been frank with me,' he began. 'If you had confided in me—'

'I couldn't very well have said more than I did,' I muttered.

'Why ?' he asked.

‘What could I have said? I didn’t want to bring George into it. And anyhow—so far as those photographs are concerned—I don’t believe—’

‘You don’t believe what?’ he asked

‘I don’t believe it matters as much as you imagine

He gazed at me half incredulously—as if I had said something outrageous—something blasphemous or obscene

‘I know what you think,’ I went on resolutely. ‘I know how it appears to you, but in reality— Oh, I can’t explain, only I’m pretty sure that George himself would have destroyed them sooner or later if they hadn’t been found’

I’m afraid this speech did neither George nor myself much good. To my father it seemed merely to prove that I was devoid of a moral sense. But he said no more, and I went out on to the golf-links with Remus, and sat looking at the sea and thinking. But I was not thinking of Uncle George’s letter. I was thinking of what had occurred that afternoon. In comparison, everything else seemed unimportant. Nor was it over—like this wretched affair of the photographs. Nor that I believed Katherine would say anything about it. I was quite sure she wouldn’t. Only I didn’t see how she could avoid saying that we had quarrelled, for there was the fact that I hadn’t turned up at dinner-time to be explained. Unless she had forgiven me and invented an excuse.

That, indeed was a possible way out, but was it probable? I didn’t know, and yet it seemed to me that it was what I myself should have done in her place. Only then, had I been in her place, I suppose nothing at all of what had happened would have happened. Had anybody wanted very much to kiss me I might have felt a distaste, but I couldn’t imagine myself getting furiously angry and hating that person—I couldn’t even imagine myself refusing.

I got up and walked slowly back to the village. A wandering troupe of open-air entertainers had arrived during the day, and were busy erecting tents, side shows, and hobby-horse machines in a large field at no great distance from our house. Most of the natives, both young and old, were looking on at these preparations with an unflagging interest which had already stretched over hours, but I was in no mood to join them. I determined to walk as far as the pier and then go home. I had not gone more than a hundred yards, however, before I regretted

this decision. I felt my face burning. Before me, coming towards me, were Katherine and Gerald. Nothing but a straight stretch of road and footpath lay between us, and it was certain that they must already have seen me. My first instinct was to turn back ; but it was too late, and I walked on, a flaming blush on my face. Gerald raised his hat ; I was not wearing one ; and I did not look at him, though I felt he was trying to signal something to me. I was looking at Katherine, but her glance just brushed mine to rest on a point beyond me. Next moment we had passed.

I walked on as far as I had intended to. On the pier steps I sat down and put my arms round Remus and kissed him. He was the only living thing in the world, after all, about whom I could be absolutely sure. If I had committed the greatest crime on earth, he still would have licked my cheek and pretended to bite my ear just as he was doing now.

Chapter 51

'I WOULD like to go up to town to-day,' I told my father next morning at breakfast.

His reply was the one I had expected. 'What do you want to go to town for ?'

'I want to see Owen.'

But my father was not satisfied with this reason. 'Hadn't you nearly three weeks when you saw him every day !' he complained.

'I want to speak to him,' I said. I knew he was thinking of the railway fare, and, having no money of my own, I was thinking of it also. But I felt I must consult somebody, and Owen was the only person I had.

My father was not in a good humour : it was easy to see that he was still worrying over Uncle George's letter ; and it must, indeed, have put him in a difficult position. He had to answer it for one thing ; and his answer had to be that he believed my story, not George's. Also he was worried. I think about his own share in the matter—inclined to blame himself because he had ignored my appeals, yet inclined to blame me too, if for

no other reason than that I was always at the centre of some kind of problem or trouble.

'Can't you write?' he went on; but writing was no use and I shook my head.

'I want to speak to him.'

'Don't go on repeating the same thing like a child,' he returned irritably.

'But why mayn't I go?' I asked.

'Because it's a waste of money.'

'It will only cost five shillings.'

'Yes, only five shillings. Five shillings for a mere whim—when a letter would reach him almost as soon.'

'It isn't a whim,' I persisted. 'Writing wouldn't be the same: I want to talk to him... Besides, I sent him a telegram before breakfast, asking him to meet me; and I can't very well not go now.'

I knew I shouldn't have done this, and my father, naturally, held the same opinion. 'You'd no right to send him a telegram,' he said. 'I suppose you did it with the idea of leaving me no alternative.'

He continued to grumble, yet in the end he allowed me to go, and I caught an early train.

I had asked Owen to meet me in the Botanic Gardens, for I didn't want to call at his house; and having arrived before the appointed time, I began to pace up and down within sight of the front terrace, my head filled with anxious thoughts. Two or three gardeners were raking the sidewalk, and a man with a pair of clippers was trimming the edges of the grass. As they pottered over their work they carried on a disjointed conversation, principally about religion, or rather about the dangers of Roman Catholicism. The man with the clippers kept referring to something that he called High Rosary, and the rakers from time to time interpolated suitable grunts, or an occasional sentence. I moved farther along the main walk and sat down.

For the first time it occurred to me that Owen might not be able to come: he might even be away from home—though this was unlikely. I looked at my watch and decided to give him another quarter of an hour. If he had not come by then I would go on to the house. I should have started now only there

was the danger of missing him, for he might come by tram.

I controlled my impatience as well as I could, but I wished that I had arranged to call for him. Nurses passed, wheeling perambulators. At a distance of five or six yards some little girls settled down stolidly to a mysterious game in which a great deal of rhymed dialogue was the chief feature. An old pensioner, sucking an empty pipe, hobbled up to my bench, seated himself in the corner, and began, with much fumbling of trembling hands, to unfold a newspaper. He did not read it, however, but turned his rheumy eyes upon me, and in a husky wavering voice made a remark about the weather. I did not want to talk, and pretended not to hear him : whereupon he repeated it more loudly, and this time I had to answer. Then suddenly I saw Owen at the gate and sprang up to meet him.

'I'm sorry if I'm late,' he said. 'I had to go a message for mother. But why didn't you come to the house ?'

'I thought it would save time if you met me here. I don't want to stay very long, and I thought we could talk as well here as anywhere.'

'But you're surely not in such a hurry as all that !' he exclaimed. 'And you'll have to come to the house anyway. What are you going to do about your lunch ? You can't go back to Newcastle starving. Besides, they expect us.'

I hadn't thought of this, and I supposed it would be better not to make a fuss. 'Let's talk first anyhow,' I said. 'We can decide about the rest later.'

Nevertheless, I did not begin at once, nor did Owen question me, though he must have wondered what had happened. He could hardly help seeing that something was wrong, but he left me to take my own time, and we walked down towards the pond, where we found a seat, and I continued to think in silence, while he waited patiently.

I had made up my mind to tell him about both the photographs and Katherine, but it would be easier, I thought, to begin with the former. I now felt that the other was going to be difficult—a great deal more difficult than I had realized when I had sent off my telegram. Still, it was the other that had brought me up to town, for it was about it that I wanted his advice. Neither communication, I feared, was likely to raise his opinion of me.

He had so far not uttered a word, but presently he turned towards me. 'Yes?' he said encouragingly.

'Something very rotten happened yesterday,' I began. 'My father got a letter from Uncle George . . . You know—the people I was living with in Cromac Street . . .'

'You're not going back there, are you?' Owen interrupted quickly.

'No—it's not that: it hasn't anything to do with that,' and he looked relieved.

'You remember my cousin George,' I went on: 'the chap who came with us to *Faust*?'

'Yes . . . I didn't like him much.'

'I know you didn't . . . However— He had some photographs that he kept hidden under the floor in our bedroom.'

I paused, but Owen evidently didn't understand: he merely looked slightly surprised. 'Kept hidden! Why?'

'Because he didn't want anybody to see them. They were that sort—pornographic.'

I just glanced at him as I added the last word, and he was gazing at me, but he said nothing. I didn't believe he knew what 'pornographic' meant. 'Indecent,' I explained: yet somehow, even then, I felt certain that he would have only the vaguest idea of what the photographs were really like. 'They were found a few days ago,' I continued, 'and he denied that they were his: so Uncle George wrote to my father to say that they must be mine . . . They were pretty bad,' I wound up: 'in fact as bad as they could be.'

'But——' Owen began. 'Didn't you say that they weren't yours?'

'Yes—only—— Well, you see, Uncle George sent the beastly things *with* his letter: I suppose he thought it was his duty. And my father got them, and it upset him a lot.'

Owen was still gazing at me. 'He must be a low-down sort of creature—that cousin of yours.'

'George? Yes: he isn't up to much. Of course he was in rather a hole, and I don't expect it occurred to him that his people would write: I dare say he thought that, since I wasn't going back there, it wouldn't matter very much to me whether I was blamed or not. Neither it would have mattered, if Uncle

George hadn't written—or even if he had written and not sent the things. My father wouldn't have realized what they were like.'

'Of course it would have mattered,' Owen said angrily. 'What is your father going to do about it?'

'I don't know. He'll write, I suppose, and tell them what I say; but it's merely George's word against mine; nobody can prove anything.' And suddenly, seeing him looking so indignant, I felt doubtful and gloomy—doubtful of the quality of my own innocence, which, in this matter at all events, had seemed perfectly clear until now. 'I'm not sure that I'm giving you a right impression,' I went on. 'I knew George had those things: he had shown them to me: it was on the night of your party.'

'All the same——'

'I know what you're going to say,' I interrupted. 'It sounds true, but it isn't true. This is the truth. I sometimes *wanted* to look at them—I mean before I actually did. Once or twice I very nearly did look at them—when George wasn't there.'

Owen said nothing, but I could see that he was worried and surprised—and a little disgusted. 'Wanting to look at them isn't the same as looking at them,' he said.

'Not quite; though I should think it's usually only a matter of time before it becomes the same . . . And Aunt Margaret may write to Mrs. Carroll—just out of spite. It would be quite like her.'

'She can hardly do that,' Owen returned half impatiently.

'I don't suppose she will,' I agreed, 'but I don't know. She hates me. Of course Mrs. Carroll wouldn't believe her. Still——'

I was silent for a minute or two, and so was he. Then I began again. 'That, however, isn't what I came up to tell you.' And I related what had happened with Katherine in the wood.

I did not look at him till I had finished. Then I did so, and he was staring straight in front of him, at the drab little duck paddling about on the pond. A rat stole out, and seeing us, scuttled back again.

'Why did you behave like that?' Owen asked uncomfortably after a long pause.

I did not answer. Evidently he was getting a new view of my character, and I could see him struggling with it. I wondered what he would have thought if I had told him everything. He said nothing more, just sat there frowning, and trying his best, I supposed, to puzzle it all out. Then suddenly he looked at me and smiled.

I was astonished. I knew it didn't mean that he was amused, however ; and tried to smile back. 'Well, that's all I came to tell you.'

He still kept silence, but his face had cleared ; evidently he had recovered from his first shock.

'Look here, Peter,' he began abruptly. 'I know I know nothing about these things, but all the same I'm going to advise you, and I'm pretty sure it's good advice. I think you ought to go straight to Derryaghy as soon as you get back, and *speak* to Katherine. Would you like *me* to do anything ?'

I shook my head. 'There's nothing you could do. Wouldn't it be better for me to write ?'

'I don't think so. It would be easier, but it wouldn't be better.'

'Suppose she won't see me ?' I said.

'You can only try ; but I'm sure she will.'

'Well—— Thank you, Owen.'

'Before this happened,' he went on, 'she liked you very much—she told me so herself.'

'She doesn't like me now,' I muttered, but Owen, having made up his mind, seemed persuaded that I was magnifying things. He even began to find excuses for me. After all, in a way, it had been half an accident . . . What had happened, he meant.

'Oh no it wasn't,' I replied.

'Well, an impulse then, and I should think she's fairly impulsive herself.'

Then I remembered that she *had* once kissed me. That had been an impulse—but I knew there was a difference. I got up from the bench, and Owen got up too. As we walked back towards the park gate he continued to assure me that Katherine wasn't the sort of person to keep up a grudge against anyone, no matter how angry she might have been at the time : and

though I was far from convinced, and felt that all his arguments were biased by friendship and his own extraordinary ingenuousness, I did begin to feel less disconsolate.

Chapter 52

OWEN had cheered me up a little. I was glad I had come, and during my return journey I pondered the advice he had given me and decided to act upon it. I waited till half-past nine in the evening, by which hour I thought Gerald would as usual have gone out, for I wished to avoid him : then I went up to Derryaghy. So far as I could see, the only way was to call just as if nothing had happened, and trust to luck to get a few minutes alone with Katherine.

But at the door my courage failed me, and I stepped softly round to the terrace, and, standing in the deep shadow of the house, looked to see who was in the room. The curtain was undrawn, and the room was full of lamplight. They were all there. Gerald had not gone out—he was sprawling on his back on the sofa. Katherine was working at her tablecloth—her head bowed, so that I could not see her face ; Miss Dick was reading ; Mrs. Carroll was playing patience. Presently Katherine looked up, and for a moment or two I watched her gazing out into the darkness. The others, except Mrs. Carroll, had their backs turned to me ; a small fire was burning in the grate.

I stood there under a deepening fascination. The impression was strange, and even slightly weird. Looking in upon them, all so silent and so unconscious of my presence, I had a peculiar feeling that if I came into their line of vision they would still not see me ; I had a feeling that I actually *was* invisible—and moreover, was not the only watcher there. If we were invisible of the room, perhaps we might not be invisible to one another. Faces, pale and dim, were peering in at other windows. Within and without, the house was alive with shadows—ghosts that hovered outside here on the terrace—ghosts that, inside, glided up and down the side, dark, creaking staircase, or stood listening in the upper rooms. I stepped back and looked at the

long line of dark, vacant windows, with just here and there a glimmer of light. And I felt as if I no longer belonged to the same world as the occupiers of the room I watched. I, too, was a spirit, a ghost ; my place was upstairs—in dim passages—by trembling blinds—pulled aside for just a moment that we might peep out ; in darkened rooms ; behind doors whose handles the timid maid—hurrying by in her glimmer of unsteady candle-light—feared to turn. I was the breath that set the curtains billowing ; the sudden draught that made the lamplight flicker ; the faint sound as of a chair pushed back on an upper floor ; the pale reflection passing across the mirror, and gone before there was time to strike a match. I was that mysterious something one turned one's head quickly to see, and did not see ; the cold touch that awakened just before dawn ; the grey ghostly figure seen sitting by the window in the first wan twilight, and no longer there after one had rubbed one's eyes . . .

And still I stood there, for the will to act was gone . . . Myself motionless and detached, I had the strange impression of watching those others gliding steadily on and on in time. It was not an abstract idea, a metaphysical figure of speech : I seemed literally to see it—as if they were moving away from me in time that had become also space—moving away, never to return. Then, with a startling distinctness, I heard the clock strike ten . . .

I must write to Katherine. I could not go in now ; it was too late ; *Mrs. Carroll and Miss Dick would be going to bed.* If Katherine came out on to the terrace I might find courage to speak to her, but I knew she would not come. Gerald, on the other hand, who had suddenly risen from the sofa, almost certainly would ; and if he discovered me prowling about here what would he think ? I slipped away, like a veritable ghost, my footsteps making no noise on the faded grass.

Chapter 53

I WROTE that night to Katherine, but she did not answer my letter and I had no heart to send another. Two days passed, during which I did not go near Derryaghy, but took to gardening and when Gerald called for me on the second afternoon I

offered this as an excuse for not going with him. The fact was that I felt uncomfortable in his society, not knowing how much he knew. He might very well know everything, I thought, or nearly everything ; for he had witnessed my humiliation on the evening Katherine had pretended not to see me, and of course he must have questioned her about it afterwards and received some kind of reply.

During these days I made one or two feeble attempts to get on more cordial terms with my father—belated efforts which met with no success. It seemed to me that either he suspected the genuineness of my advances, or else was unconscious of them ; at any rate his unresponsiveness discouraged me, and on the evening of the third day, having nothing better to do, I strolled listlessly in the direction of the field occupied by the steam-circus proprietors.

It was recognizable from afar, because of a luminous cloud that hung above it, like a curtain of fire against the night. Also the wind was blowing from that direction, and, as I approached, my ears were filled with the music blared out of a couple of steam-organs—a music broken every now and again by shrill convulsive shrieks. Swings, shooting-galleries, side-shows—all were in active operation when I arrived ; but the chief centres of attraction were the two hobby-horse machines, brightly painted and flashing with mirrors and gilding. I mingled in the outer ring of spectators gathered round the larger of these monsters, and stood gazing at it, as it revolved swiftly and rhythmically to the throbbing din of brazen pipes. Puffs of steam, coloured by the glare of naphtha lamps, shot up against the sky. Girls with flushed excited faces, tossed hair and shining eyes, leaned sidelong from the horses' backs—laughed, and swayed in a kind of innocent abandon towards their accompanying sweethearts. Arms were round waists ; the pops of rifles mingled with the pulsing din of music, the screams of the steam-whistle, and the raucous or shrill tones of male and female voices. Standing there, in lonely contemplation of this scene of Dionysian revelry, I felt as completely out of touch with it as if I had wandered from another planet. Then suddenly I felt a hand laid lightly on my arm, and looking round, saw the laughing face of Annie Breen.

She asked me if I had seen their Willie, but without waiting

for an answer went on to chatter about the unprecedented crowd of people. There were, she said, far more than usual. Some had come over from Castlewells, and others were excursionists from Belfast, who had missed the last train, if they had ever intended to catch it. Nobody knew where they were going to sleep, Annie continued: the boarding-houses and the small hotel were full up; and the big one, she was sure, wouldn't take them. They'd probably have to stay out all night.

'There's room for two there,' she suddenly cried, as the machine before us began to slow down. 'Those white horses. Ellen Gibson and Brian Seery are getting off. Ellen's going to be sick too, by the look of her. Did you ever see . . . ! She's *green!*'

I made a half-hearted movement forward, and in my lack of enthusiasm was ousted by a more eager couple whose eyes had been as quick as Annie's. But there was no hint of reproach in the smile she turned on me. 'We'll get the next two, and I'd just as leave watch anyway—wouldn't you?'

'There's Willie over there,' I suggested. 'Perhaps you'd like—'

But she did not allow me to finish. 'I don't care about the horses,' she said quickly. 'Only maybe I'm keeping you; maybe you're waiting for somebody.'

'No,' I answered indifferently.

'Let's go round the tents then. Will you?'

We moved over to the one which appeared to have attracted the largest crowd. In the foreground, just beyond the barrier, was a long counter, or table, covered with cheap ornaments, artificial jewellery, and boxes of pale unhealthy-looking cigars; while at the back, set in tiers against the canvas of the tent itself, were three rows of grotesque painted wooden heads on hinges. Surrounded by a group of encouraging spectators, George Edge was stolidly bombarding these with a good deal of success, though what he intended to do with his prizes I couldn't imagine. We stood and watched him, and every now and again a loud smack would be followed by the instantaneous disappearance of one of the heads.

'Have a throw, you,' said Annie. 'Go on. You can do it as well as him.'

I doubted this, but it did not much matter. George yielded me his place ; I paid twopence ; and a fat woman, smelling strongly of whisky, handed me three wooden balls about the size of tennis balls. In sheer absence of mind with the first of these I very nearly bagged the proprietor himself, who just then bobbed up close behind the dolls, and in features, complexion, and expression, strikingly resembled them.

'Serves him right,' said Annie. 'What's he think he's doing !'

'Collecting George's ammunition,' I replied. 'I didn't see him getting in behind.'

But I took more care next time, and after spending sixpence was successful, to the delight of Annie, who chose a gold-and-turquoise brooch as a prize. We moved on to another booth, leaving George still pegging away, and this time Annie herself won a walking-stick, by throwing a wooden ring over it. The stick, of course, was presented to me.

'Let's get out of the glare for a bit,' she proposed suddenly. 'It's that hot ! with all the lights and things—and we can come back later.'

We passed behind the tents, and a few steps brought us into shadow. A few more steps brought us to a bank under a hawthorn hedge, where we sat down. I had nothing to say to her, and as it did not seem to matter to Annie whether we talked or not, pursued my own thoughts. She leaned up against me confidently, but I was scarcely more conscious of her presence than of the bank on which I sat. I was thinking, and presently, I put a question to her—put it in all seriousness. 'Suppose, Annie,' I began very deliberately. 'Suppose you were friends with somebody—somebody like me, say. Suppose you knew he was fond of you ; and one day when you were alone together, without asking you if he might, he put his arms round you and kissed you—would you be very angry with him—so angry that you would never speak to him again ?'

I stared fixedly at the ground as I awaited her answer—and I awaited it with a certain anxiety. It seemed to be a long time in coming, and I was just on the point of looking up when I felt two warm soft lips pressed against my cheek. The unexpected nature of this response took me so completely by surprise that abruptly I drew back. And even then it was a moment or two

before I realized that Annie—perhaps naturally—had seen in my question only a timid method of courtship. It was none the less awkward, however, for undeterred by my involuntary recoil—which I suppose she took as being due either to shyness or lack of experience—she leaned her head sentimentally on my shoulder, and we sat in this absurd position for several minutes during which I reflected on the unfathomableness of feminine nature. Then, feeling I had really done as much as decency required, I got up. 'We must try the hobby-horses,' I said; not because I wanted to try them, but because it seemed to be the only way out of the present ridiculous situation.

Annie rose too, though with no great alacrity: in fact she looked both disappointed and slightly cross. As we made our way back she remarked that she was sick of the hobby-horses, but I pretended not to believe her, and this time, when the machine came to a standstill, I was a good deal more expeditious in clambering on to it. We secured places—my horse being on the outside and Annie's, of course, next to it. Unfortunately, we were no sooner perched up there than I saw Katherine and Gerald joining the circle of onlookers. I felt my face grow hot. There I was, full in the light, with Annie beside me; and we remained in this position for what seemed an eternity before the engineer, satisfied that every seat was filled, at last decided to set us in motion.

Annie had quite recovered her gaiety, and was laughing and chattering, though most of her remarks being of an exclamatory nature, I did not need to reply to them. Had she too seen the Dales, I wondered? for her vivacity had suddenly become much more noisy and familiar. I noticed that all the other riders were obviously in couples, and that many of the boys were supporting their partners in an ostentatiously gallant fashion. Annie had already given me a hint that I might follow suit, by telling me half a dozen times she was sure she would fall off. I didn't care very much whether she did or not: I wished that I, at least, was miles away. And meanwhile, with shrill and frivolous screams, the huge construction had begun to turn slowly, and our horses to move up and down on their polished brass rods. We glided by within a yard or two of Katherine and Gerald, but I stared straight in front of me, my cheeks burning. I would have liked to pretend that I was by myself, but the behaviour

of Annie made all such pretence impossible. Round and round we swept, for a second and a third time, gathering velocity at every moment. Annie had taken off her hat and put it on my horse's head, and her skirts streamed out in the wind and flapped against my leg.

‘Peter!’

It was Katherine's voice. She had called my name. It came to me through the night, and a violent emotion shook me. I could not have spoken : my eyes were hot and misty ; and again the great machine swept round.

But in the place where Katherine and Gerald had been I could no longer see them. Where had they gone ? I searched the crowd as we wheeled past, but could find them nowhere. The organ belched out its coarse tune ; the steam throbbed ; the whistle hooted ; we rushed on faster and faster.

Where were they ? She had called to me. Perhaps they had only stayed for a minute or two and were already on their way home. I could wait no longer, but slid down from my horse's back. Annie screamed ; the man who was collecting fares while the ride was still in progress made a grab at my arm ; but I jumped clear—jumped and fell headlong, rolling over, and knocking most of the breath out of my body. Instantly there was a scene. Everybody pressed round me, everybody seemed to think I must be either ill or mad. I scrambled to my feet, and, without waiting to brush the dust from my clothes, without a word to anyone, pushed my way through a crowd of people who appeared half inclined to detain me by force, and hurried as fast as I could in pursuit of Katherine and Gerald.

But I saw no sign of them. They had vanished as mysteriously as Persephone on that summer morning long ago. I clambered through a hedge and out on to the road, but there was no one there either ; and I knew I had lost them, for the road lay straight and bare and empty in both directions.

I halted by the sea-wall, uncertain what to do. But it was useless to wait, and I walked on—leaving the scene of revelry—the glare and din and Annie—rapidly behind me. I took my old path over the golf-links till I reached the hollow where I always came when I wanted to be alone. There I flung myself down on the soft white powdery sand, among the thin grey grasses, in the pallid starlight. My breast was surging with

emotions at once exultant and desolating. I could not understand what had taken place. Only I heard again and again the sound of my name as it had come to me, in Katherine's voice, through the night.

61 I lay there for a long time. I was crying, I think, but I did not know I was crying, though I kept rubbing my eyes with my sleeve. I was unconscious of everything around me ; I was blind and deaf ; and it was only when I felt a hand on my shoulder that I looked up, startled, to find Katherine bending over me.

'Peter, what is the matter ? Is it my fault ?'

Her voice was all gentleness ; in her face was nothing but kindness ; yet I could not speak.

'It's nothing,' I stammered out at last. 'Only I thought—you were never going to speak to me again.'

62 'I know. I was horrid. I can't think now why I was so horrid ! Forgive me, Peter, won't you ? Tell me that you will.'

'It was my fault,' I muttered. 'It was all my fault.'

'It wasn't ; but never mind whose fault it was ; let's forget all about it.'

'I can't forget,' I said. 'It was my fault.'

'But why—why can't you forget—when I want you to ? Can't you forget even if I tell you that I *do* like you, that I'm very fond of you ?' . .

I scrambled up and stood facing her. 'Are you—really ?' I faltered. 'I'd rather you didn't say it if—if it's not true.'

'But it is true.'

'How true is it ?' I asked, for I was sick of uncertainty, and of false hopes that faded in a few hours. 'Do you like me as much as you like Gerald ?'

She thought for a moment, her clear gaze fixed on my face. 'Yes,' she said at last, and there was something that through all my longing and pain touched me in her evident desire to be completely honest. 'I think I like you better than anybody.' she went on, 'except mother.'

I sighed ; I could not help it.

She looked at me gravely, but not reproachfully. 'Why can't you be content with that, Peter ? Why must you always want more than I can give ?'

'And Owen?' I muttered, though I was ashamed of myself for doing so.

'I like Owen too. I think he's very nice . . . And now, tell me you're content, for I must go; and I shan't feel happy unless I know you are.'

'I am happy,' I lied. But I saw that it was all hopeless, and that she would never understand.

'We'll see you to-morrow, then? I can't stop now: Gerald is waiting for me.'

'Where were you when I looked for you?' I asked. 'I heard you call my name and I jumped off, but when I went to look for you, you were gone.'

'It was Miss Dick's fault. She insisted on coming with us; and then, as soon as we got there, she wanted to go home. We went round by the back road, not by the sea. It was Gerald who suggested coming out again. He thought—I don't know why—that we might find you here. And I'm very glad we came. I couldn't go on any longer without making it up. But I mustn't—really—wait now. I promised Gerald I wouldn't be long. He wanted to go home without me, but you see I wasn't at all sure you'd be here, so I wouldn't allow him to. Good-night, Peter—unless you'd like to come with us?'

I shook my head. 'Good-night.'

'We'll see you to-morrow then—to-morrow morning.'

She was gone; and I was left to whatever consolation I could extract from the thought that she had wanted to make it up with me—had sought me out on purpose to make it up with me—prompted by Gerald.

Chapter 54

IN the morning I awoke very early, with a feeling of restless expectancy. I knew I could not go to sleep again, and to fill in the time before breakfast I went down to the shore and bathed off the sand. The sun was shining, but there were heavy clouds low on the horizon, and I felt pretty sure there would be a change in the weather before long.

If not in a more serene, I was at least in a more resigned mood

than I had been last night. On one thing I was determined—to make the most of my few remaining days with Katherine. Far too much time already had been wasted and spoiled—practically the whole of her visit—and now barely a week was left in which to realize all that for a year I had looked forward to.

Of course, at the best, it could only be a compromise. The kind of love I had dreamed of I must put out of my mind. But there could be the friendship and affection she had shown last night, and perhaps from this something else might eventually— Half impatiently I checked myself: there must be no more longings, dreamings, and imaginings. I had a week in which I should be seeing her every day.

After breakfast, after the customary prayers and scripture, I set out for Derryaghy; but it was still early, and when on turning the corner I met Gerald, I was so surprised that I came to a halt in the middle of the road. But Gerald was not surprised. 'I thought I'd catch you, Peter,' he said. 'Don't look so flabbergasted. Or is it simply that you're overjoyed at seeing me?'

As a matter of fact I *was* glad to see him. I remembered that he had gone out of his way last night to do me a service, and that it had been the very rare sort of service that implies not only kindness but also imagination and sympathy. The point I somehow felt to be not so much that he had done what he *had* done, as that he should have divined, without a word from me, that there was anything he *could* do. This was where he was different from most people.

'I suppose you're bound for Derryaghy,' he went on; and without waiting for an answer: 'I'll come with you if I may . . . I've just been sending off a wire.'

'Oh,' I replied.

It did not occur to me to attach any particular significance to his last words, nor was it, indeed, till a rather lengthy pause had followed them, that I began to suspect he had something to tell me, and was considering the best way to set about it.

It came abruptly enough when it did come. 'We're going home this afternoon,' he said—making the bare announcement, without emphasis, and without looking at me. 'Katherine's packing at the present moment,' he added, 'so we needn't hurry.'

'But—— I faltered, and got no further

'I'd better explain,' Gerald continued, still gazing straight in front of him. 'It's a rather sudden change of plan, I'm afraid but it was made because of a letter Katherine got this morning. I don't know whether she has ever mentioned her friends the Nugents to you. The letter was from them, and it was to say they're starting off for Italy next week, and to invite her to go with them. Personally, I think the whole Nugent family poisonous, but that's not Katherine's view. They make a lot of her, and, as they've tons of money, the trip is likely to be done in style—*trains de luxe*, best hotels, and all that sort of thing.'

I had by this time recovered myself. 'No, I never heard of them,' I said.

Gerald shrugged his shoulders. 'Well, she only got to know them last autumn—met the girls playing golf or something. The father's in the boot trade, and has about sixty shops scattered over the country. Dora—the second girl—is Katherine's special pal, and there's a son too—a bit older and in the business—so I don't suppose he'll be a member of the party.'

I walked on in silence. I need have made no plans, no resolutions—even last night's reconciliation seemed now hardly to matter. Presently I spoke—without, I think, betraying anything of what I felt, for my voice sounded only flat and dull. 'Why did you say that?' I asked. 'I mean about the son.'

Gerald looked me straight in the face and answered bluntly. 'Because, Peter, I think it's better to give you the whole thing as it appears to me, and as I'm pretty sure it is. I don't believe in letting people down gradually when you know that in the end they're *going* to be let down. It's no doubt pleasant and easier to leave them in ignorance, but I've always had a strong dislike myself for that particular form of amiability. I haven't the least notion as to what Katherine's idea of this Nugent chap may be, beyond the fact that he's been buzzing about her a lot and that she doesn't seem to object. That's the point—nobody objects—on either side—far from it. As I say the father has tons of money and the son, after all, is quite respectable—been at a public school and Oxford. This is only an impression, Peter, but one can see what's in the air and even the Italian

trip, I imagine, is a part of the same scheme—though “scheme,” I dare say, is too strong a word. Katherine, to do her justice, I don’t expect has the least suspicion of it ; but there it is. I told you simply that you might be prepared beforehand. ‘Perhaps you’d better be prepared also to find her in a state of simmering joy. She’s unlikely to hide it, or even to think of hiding it. She’s not very understanding, and has absolutely no imagination.’

We said little more : I myself said nothing—except to thank him—for I had nothing to say.

‘Are you coming in ?’ he asked, when we reached Derryaghy, but I shook my head.

‘I’ll tell Katherine you’re here, then, and where to find you.’

‘Thanks,’ I mumbled. ‘I’ll wait . . . near the summer-house.’

He left me, and I went on. Beside the summer-house I sat down and stared at a clump of elder trees. There was no use thinking about it. Not until I knew.

In five—perhaps ten minutes, I saw her coming. She smiled and waved a greeting. ‘So there you are !’ she cried while she was still twenty yards off. ‘Why on earth didn’t you come in, instead of dragging me out here ? It’s going to pour too—by the look of it !’

‘You can shelter in the summer-house,’ I answered laconically.

‘Yes, but I don’t like summer-houses—particularly this one, which is swarming with carwigs and spiders.’ I could see she was as pleased and excited as Gerald had warned me she would be. ‘There, I knew it !’ she exclaimed, for the first few drops of rain had begun to platter on the leaves.

‘You’d better come inside,’ I told her. ‘It will be heavy while it lasts’ I dusted the rough seat for her with my handkerchief, and she sat down, while I stood near the door, not fobing her. ‘I suppose you’re astonished, Peter, at this abrupt departure. So am I, for that matter, though I don’t see why Gerald can’t stay on.’

‘He told me you had had a letter,’ I replied.

‘Two letters,’ she corrected. ‘The second was from mother.’

‘Your mother knows, then ?’ I said.

Katherine laughed. ‘Well, naturally. I mean, of course they asked her first. But why must I talk to your back, Peter ?

Surely you aren't angry with me ? You knew that anyhow we'd be going in a few days.'

'You want to go ?' I asked.

It had been getting rapidly darker, and now, without further warning, the rain burst down in a deluge, very soon making it plain that the roof of our shelter was far from watertight. From the distance there came the harsh scream of a sea-gull—a mournful solitary note.

'And I haven't even an umbrella !' Katherine said. 'We'll be soaked.'

'It won't last,' I told her. 'It's only a shower.'

'I hope so.' She came over to the door and stood beside me, looking out. 'At any rate it can't last like this,' she agreed.

Before I could answer there came a blinding flash of lightning, followed instantaneously by an explosion that sounded very near. 'Some tree must have gone !' Katherine exclaimed.

Perhaps it had : I didn't care. 'I wish it had been this summer-house,' I muttered under my breath.

She heard me. 'Don't talk like that, Peter. It isn't very nice of you, even if you *are* disappointed.'

I did not answer, and the flash was succeeded by no other, though the rain continued in a fierce downpour. An uneasy wind had risen, and the light had faded to a sombre yellowish dusk.

'How can you be so indifferent ?' I asked abruptly. I had been trying not to say it : I knew I had no right to reproach her : but I could keep it back no longer.

She did not pretend to misunderstand me, though she did not reply at once. Then she said : 'I'm not indifferent, Peter : it's not that at all. I'd quite like to stay on here if—— Well, it's only that the other is a chance which may never happen again. I *do* want to go : that's perfectly true. I've only been abroad once in my life, and I've never been to Italy. But let's put it this way. Suppose Aunt Clara or somebody had suggested taking *you*, wouldn't you be feeling just as pleased about it as I am ?'

'No,' I answered, 'I wouldn't. And I wouldn't go.'

'Well, I'm sorry,' Katherine murmured. 'I mean I'm sorry you're disappointed, though I don't see how I could help it : I didn't arrange the time . . . It's beginning to get lighter.'

she went on next moment. 'Perhaps we shan't be drowned after all.'

'You don't care,' I told her bitterly. 'This may be the last time we'll ever be alone together. But I dare say you hope it will be.'

It was a childish speech no doubt, and I turned away from her as soon as I had spoken it. Then, suddenly, I felt her lips touch my cheek. Her face was cold and wet with the rain that had been blowing in upon us. She put her hand on my shoulder. I kissed her, but once only, and very lightly, no more than that ; because I knew her own kiss had been given merely to console me—the kind of kiss one might give an unhappy child.

We stood in silence till she said softly : 'Will you walk back to the house with me, Peter ? The rain's practically over, and I haven't finished packing yet. Of course you'll be staying for lunch.'

'No,' I mumbled, 'I don't want to . . . I don't want to see the others : I'd rather say good-bye here.'

'Well, good-bye then ; though it's only *au revoir*, isn't it ?' She smiled encouragingly, her hand still on my shoulder. 'The train leaves at half-past three, remember ; though we're sure to be at the station before that . . . And do try not to feel so gloomy about it. I won't be staying in Italy for ever.'

Chapter 55

I DID not tell my father that the Dales were going away, nor was I at the station to see them off. I knew that my absence would strike everybody—except Gerald perhaps—as strange ; that it would certainly provoke questions from both Mrs. Carroll and Miss Dick ; but I could not help that, I could not go. Besides, I *had* said good-bye to Katherine, and Gerald would say I had said good-bye to him . . .

I went out, keeping to the fields, so that I might meet nobody, and eventually entering the Derryaghy woods at a point far from the house. An idea had begun to hover at the back of my mind—or perhaps not as yet an idea—only a feeling—that I did not wish to go on living. It was not, I told myself, as if

patience and waiting could achieve anything. They could only bring to-morrow, next week, next month—and all these would be the same as to-day. Katherine would give all I had longed for to someone else ; and the vision of this, with everything that it implied, spiritually and physically, floated so vividly before me that I could see nothing else.

I cannot say now how far my state of mind was removed from definite determination, but the thought that it was in my power to end my unhappiness had a kind of hypnotic fascination, and I brooded over it. The simplest way, perhaps, would be to contrive a bathing accident. All I had to do was to swim out and out until it would be impossible to return. Yet I knew, too, that this might not be so easy, for I was a strong swimmer, accustomed from childhood to the water, and in the end, very possibly, my resolution might fail.

Was it really grief that I felt ? Certainly I was miserable, but my feeling was partly physical, and it swept over me in waves, leaving intervals of cold depression. Then I would find myself staring stupidly at the trees, while for a few moments my mind would be completely blank and insensible.

I lingered on in the woods, though it had begun to rain—not heavily, but continuously—so that by the time I reached home I was wet enough to receive a scolding from my father for having gone out without an overcoat. He insisted on my changing my clothes, and by some unhappy chance it was what he said, the arguments he used, that actually put into my mind a plan which I thought would awaken no suspicion and at the same time be easy to carry out.

All evening, while we sat together in the parlour, I listened to the rain and hoped it would not go over. In spite of a wind that had arisen it showed no sign of doing so, and when, at his customary hour, my father closed his book and got up to go to bed, I knew we were in for a rough night. I went upstairs with him, but I did not take off my clothes ; I lit a candle, and sat down on the side of my bed.

Presently I opened the door and listened. He was asleep : I could hear his heavy breathing. Yet still I waited on, and it was not till shortly before midnight that I undressed and crept downstairs. I put on my shoes, and a greatcoat over my nightshirt. Then, leaving the parlour window unlatched for

my return, I stole out of the house, just as I had so often done in the days of our club.

I hurried along the road and across the golf-links in a cold driving rain. I might have come earlier, for there was not a chance of anyone being out on such a night as this. It was pitch dark, but the way was familiar, and at the edge of the sea I took off my coat, and stretching myself on the soaking ground, let the wind and the rain sweep over me. I lay there long after I was numb with cold. Then at last I got up, put on my coat, and went home.

I reached the house and climbed in through the window. I paused outside my father's door to make sure that he was still asleep. Better perhaps to keep on my wet nightshirt, I thought ; so I got into bed just as I was. For the first time I began to wonder what illness was in store for me. Pneumonia was what I had thought of ; and had taken for granted that it would be brief and fatal. But I now saw that it might be something long, painful, and not fatal—possibly rheumatic fever. And I could not go to sleep. Hour after hour passed, and I tossed and turned. Towards morning, however, I must have slept, for when I opened my eyes the sun was shining in on me. I was no longer wet, no longer cold ; on the contrary, a burning heat seemed like a fire under my skin. My head ached ; my entire body ached ; I could not lie for two minutes without changing my position : nevertheless I got up, dressed, and went downstairs.

At breakfast I only pretended to eat, for I had no appetite, and my throat was sore. My father questioned me, but I told him I was all right, and later on he left me, saying he wanted to look in at the school, which was being whitewashed and prepared for its reopening next week. I was much the same when he returned, but before night I began to feel worse, though I disguised this as well as I could. My father went out again, this time to some church meeting, and when I was alone I would have gone to bed had it not been for the task of climbing two flights of stairs and undressing. I half sat, half lay, in a chair, with my eyes shut. At every breath I drew my side hurt me : also I had begun to cough a little, and that hurt me still more. It had all come on so rapidly, that I wondered if I should die that night.

When my father came in he immediately saw that I was really

ill, and helped me to bed before going for the doctor. I had indeed by now half forgotten the cause of my illness, what had led me to seek it, and that I had desired it to be fatal. I was perhaps a little light-headed; too tired, at all events, to care much about anything; and, in spite of the pain in my side I sank into a doze, from which my cough would every now and then awaken me.

Chapter 56

AND after all I failed. I got better, though not quite well, for my lungs remained delicate, and in October Mrs. Carroll—not satisfied with Doctor Edge's opinion—took me to be examined by a specialist. I was overhauled, stethoscoped, and finally it was decided that I needed sunshine and a warmer climate, if that could be arranged. Apparently it could. I listened to the discussion which followed, taking no part in it naturally, but merely sitting on the sofa in the consulting-room.

'For the winter?' Mrs. Carroll asked.

'For the winter, certainly.'

'And afterwards?'

'Well, we must wait and see. In the meantime, is there anything to—'

'To prevent it?' Mrs. Carroll filled in the pause. 'There is only the difficulty of his future: he was to have gone to Oxford for another year.'

'I understand. Yes. Well, a year may make all the difference.'

They were both looking at me, and the doctor made murmuring sounds, non-committal, yet suggestive. He did not like to hold out promises that might not be fulfilled. He had taken a sample of my blood: he wished to see me again—at the end of the week. 'What about a tutor for me?—a tutor and travelling-companion?' He thought it would be quite possible to get somebody who had recently come down from one or other of the Universities—somebody with whom I could read for my examination, on the chance that everything *would* turn out all right. He didn't know much about it, but he imagined

there would be little difficulty. He had a friend at Oxford to whom he could write if Mrs. Carroll liked. In fact, that might be the best plan. He would write tonight, and let her know as soon as he had received an answer.

‘ We made an appointment for a second visit, and left. We had lunch in town, and caught the next train back to Newcastle. I was staying at Derryaghy to complete my convalescence, but Mrs. Carroll stopped the carriage at the end of the Bryansford Road and got out. She wanted to give my father the news ; she might be some little time, she said : it would be better for me to go on, and she would walk home.

The October sunlight, still with a little of the warmth of summer in it, was slanting through the yellowing trees as the carriage turned in at the lodge gate. There was an autumnal languor in the air, a kind of dreamy beauty ; and far out on the sea a white sail gleamed. I wondered if I should be leaving it all behind me for ever when I went away. I didn’t know what Mrs. Carroll’s impression had been—we both had avoided the subject—but it had struck me that the doctor’s manner was rather guarded—perhaps, however, on principle.

I went upstairs to my own room. The journey had not tired me, and I sat down in the window-seat, and began to scribble a note to Owen, which I did not finish. It occurred to me that later on I might have more definite news to give him, and at any rate, if I were going away, I should want him to come down to see me. With that, I sat dreaming. I wondered if in years to come another boy would occupy this room and sit in this window-seat ; and if his thoughts would, for a moment perhaps, touch mine ? All *my* thoughts would be dead then ; my dreams vanished. I had been a very little chap when I had first sat here. If the ghost of that little boy could come back, how should I greet him ? He seemed quite different from the ‘ me ’ who was thinking of him now. But he could not come back ; just one person in the world knew anything about him ; and he too, I supposed, would gradually forget . . .

‘ Why are you sitting up here in the cold, child ? ’

It was Mrs. Carroll who had opened the door and was speaking to me. ‘ How long have you been here ? Come down to tea.’

I opened my eyes and saw that the room had filled with

dusk. 'Oh, not very long,' I said. 'I'm not cold.' But I shivered as I spoke.

'That means you've been here ever since you came in. It's really very wrong of you, Peter—with a warm room and a comfortable fire downstairs, and nobody to disturb you.'

'I forgot,' I said. 'I didn't intend to sit here. And I wasn't cold—not till just this minute.'

There was no one in the drawing-room when we went down, and I was glad that we were going to be alone. I sat on the hearthrug, hugging my knees, gazing into the red, glowing grate.

'Is Miss Dick out?' I asked.

'Yes,' Mrs. Carroll answered. 'She went out to tea.'

I waited till we had had tea ourselves and the things had been cleared away. Then I said: 'There's something I ought to tell you.'

Mrs. Carroll, her plump, rather large hands moving swiftly and deftly among soft fleecy wool, was knitting what looked like an under-garment for me. 'Yes,' she replied mildly.

But instead of proceeding I asked a question. 'Won't it cost a lot—my going away—especially with a tutor?'

'No; not very much,' and I could see that she did not wish to discuss the matter.

'I have a reason for asking,' I persisted, but she went on working in silence.

'If I were related to you—if I were your nephew—it would be different.'

At this she did speak. 'What would be different?' she asked.

Her needles clicked placidly: she looked placid—kind, yet a little sad.

'Why do you think I'm worth it?' I went on. 'Suppose I told you that all this—all my illness, I mean—was not accidental?'

Mrs. Carroll showed no alarm. She merely disengaged her ball of wool from Miss Dick's cat, who had stretched out a tentative paw.

'I mean that I did it myself,' I blurted out impulsively. 'I did it on purpose. I wanted to die, to kill myself, and I thought of this way. I went out and lay on the golf-links in the

rain, with nothing on but my nightshirt ; and next morning I took ill."

Immediately I regretted having spoken. What good was there in telling her now ? Besides, I wasn't even sure that I *had* wanted to die. Not really. The thought had occurred to me, the way had been suggested to me, but the rest had been due as much to a kind of recklessness and obstinacy as to anything else ; certainly if I hadn't done it that night, if I had waited even for a day or two, it never would have been done at all.

Mrs. Carroll made no remark, but she stopped knitting. I felt her hand on my head. 'Is that true, Peter ?' she asked very quietly, after a long pause.

'Oh yes, it's true.' And I stared into the fire.

She was once more silent, but she did not draw away her hand.

'Why did you do such a thing ?' she asked presently.

'Because I felt unhappy. It was very stupid : I can see that now : but I didn't think it would end like this ; I didn't think it would give anybody so much trouble.'

'Didn't you ? Surely you knew—— I don't see how you can say that—how you can think it.'

'Forgive me, forgive me, I do know,' I went on quickly. I got on my knees, I put my arms round her neck and pressed my cheek against hers. 'I've spoiled everything ; I've made a mess of everything.'

She drew me to her, but for some time she did not speak. 'It will be all right,' she said at last, 'if you try. You see, I don't know what is the matter—what was the matter—I don't know anything.'

'It's not for myself I care. It's for you—for what I've done to you.'

Her work had slipped to the floor, but she let it lie there and at last I told her—told her all. It was not easy, but I was determined to do it, and kept nothing back. In the quiet room, in the firelight, I had a feeling that we were very close to each other. It was a kind of surety. And it brought with it, if not positive happiness, at any rate a sense of healing and of peace.

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